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GRANVILLE DE VIGNE

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HELD IN BONDAGE.

A Tale of the Day.

BY "OUIDA." *pseud.*

Louise de la Roche

A NEW EDITION.

COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.

"A young man married is a man that's marred,"

SHAKESPEARE.

PHILADELPHIA:

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1876

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GRANVILLE DE VIGNE.

PART THE FIRST.

I.

THE SENIOR PUPIL OF THE CHANCERY TRIES THE SAUCE
PIQUANTE OF UNCERTAIN FATE.

THE water rushed beneath the keel, our oars dipped with regular harmony, the river-waves rippled and split, and the alders and willows tossed and waved in the sunshine, while we—private pupils, as our tutor called us, young men, as we called ourselves—used to pull up the Kennet as though we were some of a University Eight, and lunch at our favorite hostelry off raw chops and half-and-half, making, *faute de mieux*, rough, schoolboy-love to its big-boned, red-haired Hebe, happy as kings in those glorious summer days in the dead years long past and gone.

What a royal time it was—(what man among us does not say so with a sigh?)—when our hearts owned no heavier cares than a vulgus and a theorem, and no *arrière-pensée* mingled with our healthy boyish sports; when old Horace and Euripedes were the only bores we knew, and the Galatæa at the pastrycook's seemed fairer than titled Helens now; when gallops on hired shying hacks were doubly dear by prohibition, and filthy bird's-eye, smoked

in barns, sweeter to our senses than than purest Cubas smoked to-day on the steps of Arthur's or the U. S. Those were my happiest days, Heaven knows, though I've seen life as agreeably as any man could, and am not even yet as utterly blasé as one might expect. But just as, some twenty years hence, when I am gone down before the gout, and Purdey has grown too heavy, and my favorite entremets are interdicted, shall I look back to the present day with an envious sigh; so do I now often glance with a fond lingering regret to those merry boyish days when, with a handsome tip from the dear old governor, and a parting injunction respecting the unspeakable blessings and advantages of flannel from my mother, I was sent off to be a private pupil under the Rev. Josiah Primrose, D.D., F.R.S., F.R.G.S., and all the letters of the alphabet besides, I dare say, if I could but remember them.

Our modern Gamaliel was an immaculate and insignificant little man, who, on the strength of a double first, good connections, and M.B. waistcoats, offered to train up the sons of noblemen and gentlemen in the way they should go, drill Greek and instil religious principles into them, for the trifling consideration of 300*l.* per annum. He lived in a quiet little borough in the south of Berkshire, at a long, low, ivy-clad house called the Chancery, that had stupendous pretensions to the picturesque and the mediæval; and, what was of much more consequence to us, a capital little trout stream at the bottom of its grounds. Here he dwelt with a fat old housekeeper, a very good cook, a quasi-juvenile niece—who went in for the kitten line, and did it very badly, too—and four, or, when times were good, six hot-brained, wild-spirited, incipient men, worse to keep in order than a team of unbroke thoroughbreds. No great deal of authority, however, did our Doctor—in familiar parlance, “Old Joey”—attempt to exercise.

We had prayers at eight, which he read in a style of intoning peculiar to himself, more soporific in its effects than a scientific lecture or an Exeter Hall meeting, and dinner at six, a very good dinner, too, over which the fair Arabella presided, got up en grande tenue, and between those hours we amused ourselves pretty well as we chose, with cricket, and smoking, jack and trout, boating and swimming, rides on hacks such as job-masters let out to young fellows with long purses, and desperate flirtations with all the shop-girls in Frestonhills. We *did* do an amount of Greek and Euclid, of course, as otherwise the 300*l.* might have been jeopardized, but the Doctor was generally dreaming over his possible chance of the Bampton lectureship, or his next report for the Geological Society, and was as glad to give us our congé as we were to take it.

It was a mild September evening, I remember, when I first went to the Chancery. I had been a little down in the mouth at leaving home just in the best of the shooting season, and at saying good-by to my genial-hearted governor, and my own highly-prized bay, Ballet-girl; but a brisk coach drive and a good inn dinner never yet failed to raise a boy's spirits, and by the time I reached Frestonhills I was ready to face a much more imposing individual than "Old Joey." The Doctor received me in his library, with a suspicious appearance of having just tumbled out of a nap; called me his "dear young friend" on the first introduction; treated me to a text or two, ingeniously dovetailed with classic quotations; took me to the drawing-room for presentation to Arabella, who smiled graciously on me for the sake of the pines, and melons, and game my mother had sent as a propitiatory offering with her darling; and, finally, consigned me to the tender mercies of the senior pupil. That senior pupil was standing with his back to the fire and his elbows on the mantle-piece, smoking a short

pipe, in the common study. I could now, long as are the years between, sketch his picture as he looked then. He was but just eighteen, but even then he had more of the "grand air" about him than any one else I had ever seen. His figure, from its developed muscle, broad chest, slight as his form still was, and the show of strength in his splendidly moulded arm, might have passed him for much older but in his face was all the spirit, the eagerness, the fire of early youth, the glow of ardor that has never been chilled, the longing of the young gladiator for the untried arena. His features were chiseled like statuary, and well-nigh as clear and pale; his mouth and nose were clear cut, proud, and firm; the lines of the lips exceedingly delicate and haughty; his eyes were long, dark, sometimes keen as a falcon's, sometimes lighting up with wonderful passion, sometimes laughing with a winning, mischievous archness if any witticism or satire crossed his mind; his brow was wide, high, and powerful; his head grandly set upon his throat. He looked altogether, as I told him some time afterward, very like a thorough-bred, high-mettled, yet sweet-tempered racer, who was longing to run in a faster race, and who would never allow, if he died to resist it, curb, or whip, or snaffle. Such was the senior pupil, Granville de Vigne, when I saw him first in the full glow of his eager, cloudless, fearless youth. He was alone, and took his pipe out of his lips without altering his position.

"Well, young one, what's your name?"

"Chevasney."

"Not a bad one. A Chevasney of Longholme?"

"Yes. John Chevasney's son."

"So you are come to be fleeced by Old Joey? Deuced pity! Are you good for anything?"

"Only for grilling a devil, and riding cross country."

He threw back his head, and laughed a clear ringing

laugh, and gave me his hand, cordially and frankly, for all his hauteur and his seniority.

"You'll do. Sit down, innocent. I am Granville de Vigne. You know *us*, of course. Your father rode with our hounds last January, and I dined at Assheton Smith's with him after the run, I remember. Very game old gentleman he seemed. I should have thought him too sensible to have sent you down here. You'd have been much better at Eton or Rugby; there is nothing like a public school for taking the nonsense out of people. *I* liked Eton, at the least; but if you know how to hold your own and have your own way, you can make yourself comfortable anywhere. The other fellows are out, gone to a flower-show, I think; I never attend such things myself, they're too slow. There is only one of the boys worth cultivating, and he's a very little chap, only thirteen, but he's a jolly little monkey; we call him *Curly*, from his dandy gold locks. His father's a peer"—and De Vigne laughed again—"one of the fresh creation: may Heaven preserve us from it! This Frestonhills is a detestable place; you'll be glad enough to get out of it. If it weren't for sport, I should have cut it long ago, but with a hunter and a rod a man can never be dull. Are you a good shot, seat, and oar, little one?"

Those were De Vigne's first words to me, and I answered them, honored and delighted with his notice, for I had heard many tales of him, living in the next county; how, at seven years old, he had ridden unnoticed to the finish with Assheton Smith's hounds; how, three years later, he had mounted a mare none of the grooms dare touch, and, breaking his shoulder-bone in the attempt to tame her, had shut his teeth like a little Spartan, that he might not cry out during the setting; how, when he saw his Newfoundland drowning in the mere, he had plunged

in after his beloved dog, and only been rescued just as both were sinking, the boy's arms round the animal's neck; and many more like tales of him, which showed him a true scion of his spirited, self-willed, noble-hearted race, and furnished food for gossip at dull dinners, three counties taking an interest in Granville de Vigne, of the manor of Vigne, heir-prospective to forty thousand a year.

I *did* know his family—the royal-sounding “Us.” I knew them by reputation for one of the proudest houses, with one of the strongest wills of their own, and one of the purest chains of male descent that ever English family possessed. They had been the seigneurs at Vigne ever since tradition could tell; their legends were among the country lore, and their names in the old cradle songs of rough chivalry and vague romance, handed down among the peasantry from generation to generation. Many coronets had lain at their feet, but they had courteously declined them; to say the truth, they held the strawberry-leaves in supreme contempt, and looked down not unjustly on many of the roturiers of the peerage.

De Vigne's father, a Colonel of Dragoons, had fallen fighting in India when his son was six years old; and the boy had been brought up by his mother, a woman as wise as she was gentle, who gave him the love on which he would one day be glad to rest, but sent him among men, to make him worthy of his line. How this high-spirited representative of a haughty house was living down in the dull seclusion of Frestonhills was owing to a circumstance very characteristic of De Vigne. At twelve years old his mother had sent him to Eton, a match in pluck and muscle and talent for boys five years his senior. There he helped to fight the Lords' men, pounded bargees with a skill worthy of the belt, made himself captain of the boats, enjoyed all the popularity and detestation that the boy with

the cleverest head, the strongest arm, the most resolute will, and the most generous temper among his confreres is certain to gain; and from thence, when he was seventeen, got himself expelled.

His dame chanced to have a niece—a niece, tradition says, with the loveliest complexion and the most ravissant auburn hair in the world, and with whom, when she visited her aunt, all Oppidans and Tugs who saw the beatific vision became straightway enamored. Whether De Vigne was in love with her, I can't say; he always averred *not*, but I doubt the truth of his statement, he being at all times inflammable on such points; at any rate, he made her in love with him, being already rather skilled in that line of conquest, and all, I dare say, went merry as a marriage-bell, till the dame found out the affair, was scandalized and horrified, and confiding the affair to the tutor, made no end of a row in Eton. She would have pulled all the college about De Vigne's ears if he had not performed that operation for himself. The tutor, having had a tender leaning to the auburn hair on his own account, was furious; and coming in contact with De Vigne and mademoiselle strolling along by the river-side, took occasion to tell them his mind. Now opposition, much less lecturing, De Vigne in all his life never could or would brook, and he and his tutor coming to hot words, as men are apt when they quarrel about a woman, De Vigne, seizing his master in his strong arms, gave him such a ducking for his impudence as Eton master never had before or since. De Vigne, of course, was expelled for his double crime; and to please his mother, as nothing would make him hear of three years of college life, he consented to live six months in the semi-academic solitude of Frestonhills, while his name was entered at the Horse Guards for a commission in the cavalry. So at the Chancery he domiciled himself,

more as a guest than a pupil, for the Doctor was a trifle afraid of his keen eyes and quick wit; his pupil knew twenty times more of modern literature and valuable available information than himself, and fifty times more of the world and its ways; but the Doctor, like all people, be their tendencies ever so heavenward, had a certain respect for forty thousand a year. De Vigne kept two hunters and a pack in Frestonhills. He smoked Cavendish under the Doctor's own windows; he read De Kock and Le Brur in the drawing-room before the Doctor's very eyes, (and did not Miss Arabella read them too, upon the sly, though she blushed if you mentioned poor "Don Juan!") he absented himself when he chose, and went to shoot and hunt and fish with some men he knew in the county; he had his own way, in fact, as he had been accustomed to have it all his life. But it was not an obstinate or a disagreeable "own way;" true, he turned restive at the least attempt at coercion, but he was gentle enough to a coax, and though he could work up into very fiery passion, he was, generally speaking, sweet tempered enough, and had almost always a kind word, or a generous thought, or a laughing jest, for us less favored young ones.

I had a sort of boyish devoted loyalty to him then, and he deserved it from me. Many a scrape did a word or two from him get me out of with the Doctor; many a time did he send me into the seventh heaven by the loan of his magnificent four-year old; more than once did fivers come from his hand when I was deep in debt for a boy's fancies, or had been cheated through thick and thin at the billiard-table in the Ten Bells, when De Vigne paid my debts, refreshed himself by kicking the two sharpers out of the apartment, and threatened to shoot me if I offered him the money back again. A warm-hearted reverence I had for him in those pleasant boyish days, and always have

and, God bless him ! But fond as I was of him, I little foresaw how often in the life to come we two should be together in revelry and in danger, in thoughtless pleasures and dark sorrows, in the whirl of fast life and the din and dash of the battle-field, and the bitter struggle of mortal agony, when I first saw the senior pupil smoking in the study of the old Chancery at Frestonhills.

II.

“THE HEART IS A FREE AND A FETTERLESS THING.”

ONE sunny summer's afternoon, while Old Joey dozed over his “Treatise on the Wise Tooth of the Fossil Human-bosh Ichthyosaurus,” and Arabella watered her geraniums and looked interesting in a white hat with very blue ribbons, De Vigne, with his fishing-rod in his hand, looked into the study, and told Curly and me, who were vainly and wretchedly puzzling our brains over Terence, that he was going after jack, and we might go with him if we chose. Curly and I, in our adoration of our senior pupil, would have gone after him to martyrdom, I verily believe, with the greatest glorification, and we sent Terence to the dogs, (literally, for we shied him at Arabella's wheezing King Charles,) rushed in rapture for our rods and baskets, and went down with De Vigne to the banks of the Kennet. De Vigne had an especial tenderness to old Izaak's gentle art; it was the only thing over which he displayed any patience, and even in this he might have caught still more perch if he had not twitched his line so often in anger at the slow-going fish, and swore against them, for not biting,

roundly enough to terrify them out of all such intentions, if they had possessed any.

How pleasant it was beside Pope's

Kennet swift, for silver eels renowned,

rushing on its silvery course through the sunny meadow lands of Berkshire, lingering on its way beneath the checkered shadows of the interlacing branches of the oaks and elms that rival in their majesty of foliage their great neighbors the beech-woods of Bucks, dashing swiftly, with busy joyous song, under the rough-hewn arch of some picturesque rustic bridge, flowing clear and cool in the summer sun through the fragrant woodlands and moss-grown orchards, the stately forest trees of parks and pastures, the nestling villages and quiet country towns, and hawthorn hedges dropping their white buds into its changeful gleaming waves. How pleasant it was fishing for jack among our Kennet meadows, lying under the pale willows and the dark wayfaring tree with its white starry blossoms, while the cattle came down to drink up to their hocks in the flags and lilies and snowflakes fringing the river's edge; and the air came fresh and fragrant over the swathes of new-mown grass and the crimson buds of the little dog-roses. Half its beauty was lost upon us, with our boyish density to all appeals made to our less material senses, except upon De Vigne, who had even then a warm lover-like quickness of perception to all fair things nature could show him, which has never left him, though his life has chiefly passed in the excitement of cities and camps. Often he stopped to have a glance across the country as he stood trolling, spinning the line with much more outlay of strength and vehemence than was needed, landing every now and then a ten-pound pike, with a violent anathema upon it for having dared to dispute his will so long; while little Curly

lazily whipped the water, stretched full length on a fragrant bed of wild thyme. What a pretty child he was, too, poor little chap! more like one of the Pompadour's pages, or a boy-hero of the Trouvères, with his white skin and his violet eyes, than an every-day slang-talking, lark-loving English lad.

"By George! what a handsome girl," said De Vigne, taking off his cap and standing at ease for a minute, after landing a great jack that had given him no little trouble to capture it. "I'm not fond of dark women generally, but 'pon my life she is splendid. What a contour! What a figure! Do for the queen of the gipsies, eh? Why the deuce isn't she this side of the river?"

The object of his admiration was on the opposite bank, strolling along by herself, with a certain dignity of air and stateliness of step which would not have ill-become a duchess, though her station in life was probably a dress-maker's apprentice, or a small shopkeeper's daughter, at the very highest. She was as handsome as one of those brunette peasant beauties in the plains of La Camargue, with a clear dark skin that had a rich carnation glow on the cheeks, large black eyes, perfect in shape and color, if not in expression, a pure aquiline profile, and a form such as would develop with years—for she was now probably not more than sixteen or seventeen—into full Junoesque magnificence.

"By Jove! she is very handsome; and she knows it, too," began De Vigne again. "I have never seen her about here before. I'll go across and talk to her."

Go he assuredly would have done, for female beauty was De Vigne's weakness, but at that minute a short, square, choleric-looking keeper came out of the wood at our back, and went up to little Curly.

"Hallo, you there—you young swell; don't you know you are trespassing?"

"No, I don't," answered Curly, in his pretty soft voice.

"Don't you know you're on Mr. Tressillian's ground?" sang out the keeper.

"Am I? Well, give my love to him, and say I shall be very happy to give him the pleasure of my company at dinner to-night," rejoined Curly, imperturbably.

"You impudent young dog—will you march off this 'ere minute!" roared the bellicose guardian of Mr. Tressillian's right of fishing.

"Wouldn't you like to see me?" laughed Curly, flinging his march-brown into the stream.

"Curse you, if you don't, I'll come and take your rod away, you little devil," sang out the keeper.

"Will you, really? That'll be too obliging, you look so sweet and amiable as it is," said Curly, with a provoking smile on his pretty little face.

"Yes, I will; and take you up to the house and get you a month at the mill for trespass, you abominable little swell!" vowed his adversary, laying his great fist on Curly's rod; but the little chap sprang to his feet and struck his foe a vigorous blow with his childish white hand, which fell on the keeper's brawny form much as a fly's kick at the Apollo Belvidere. The man seized him round the waist, but Curly struck out right and left, and kicked, and struggled with such hearty good will, that the keeper let him go, but, keeping his hand on the boy's collar, was about to drag him up to the lord of the manor, Boughton Tressillian, whose house stood about a mile distant. But at the sound of the scuffle, De Vigne, intent on watching his beauty across the Kennet, swung round, and rushed up to Curly's rescue, the child being rather a pet of his, and De Vigne never seeing a fight between might and right without striking in with a blow for the weak one.

"Take your hands off that young gentleman," he said

with all his hauteur and impatience. "Take your hands off, do you hear? or I will give you in charge for assault."

"Will yer, Master Stilts," growled the keeper, purple with dire wrath. "I'll give *you* in charge, you mean. You're poaching—ay, poaching, for all yer grand airs; and I'll be hanged if I don't take you and the little uns, all of yer, up to the house, and see if a committal don't take the rise out of you, my game cocks."

Wherewith the keeper, whom anger must have totally blinded ere he attempted such an indignity with our senior pupil, whose manorial rights stretched over woods and waters twenty times the extent of Boughton Tressillian's, let go his hold upon Curly, and turned upon De Vigne, to collar him instead.

De Vigne's eyes flashed, and the blood mounted over his temples as he straightened his left arm and received him with a plant in the middle of his chest, with a dexterity that would have done no discredit to Tom Sayers. Down went the man under the scientific blow, only to pick himself up again and charge at De Vigne with all the violence of fury, which generally, in such attacks, defeats its own ends, and makes a man strike wildly and at random. The senior pupil had not had mills at Eton, and rounds with bargees at Little Surley, without becoming a boxer, such as would have delighted Lord William Lennox. He threw himself into a scientific attitude, and, contenting himself with the defensive for the first couple of rounds, without being touched himself, caught the keeper on the left temple, with a force that sent that individual down like a felled ox. There he lay, like a log, on the thyme and ground ivy and woodbine, till I fancy De Vigne had certain uncomfortable suspicions that he might have killed him. So he picked him up, gave him a good shake, and,

finding him all right, except decidedly sulky, frightfully vengeful, and full of most unrighteous oaths, though not apparently willing to encounter such another round, De Vigne pushed him on before him, and took him up to Mr. Tressillian's to keep his word, and give him in charge.

Weive Hurst, Boughton Tressillian's manor-house, was a fine, rambling, antique old place, with castellated walls and deep mullioned windows, its façade looking all the grayer and the older in contrast to the green lawn, with its graceful larches, silvery fountains, and brilliantly-filled flower-beds that stretched in front of it. The powdered servant that opened the door looked not a little startled at our unusual style of morning visit, but gave way, as everybody always did, before De Vigne, and showed us into the library, where Mr. Tressillian sat—a stately, kindly, silver-haired old gentleman. De Vigne sank into the easy-chair, wheeled for him, and opened the proceedings with that urbane courtesy and winning softness which, when joined to his aristocratic hauteur of appearance, won him the suffrages of all who saw him. He told his tale frankly and briefly; demonstrated, as clearly as if he had been a lawyer, our right to fish on the highway-side of the river, (an often disputed point for anglers,) and the consequent illegality of the keeper's assault; and Boughton Tressillian, open to conviction, though he *was* a county magnate and a magistrate, admitted that he had no right over that part of the Kennet, agreed with De Vigne that his keeper was in the wrong, promised to give the man a good lecture, and apologized to his visitor for the interference and the affront.

“If you will stay and dine with me, Mr. De Vigne, and your young friends also, it will give me very great pleasure,” said the cordial and courteous old man.

“I thank you. We should have been most happy,” re-

turned our senior pupil; "but as it is, I am afraid we shall be late for Dr. Primrose."

"For Dr. Primrose!" exclaimed Tressillian, involuntarily. "You are not——"

"I am a pupil at the Chancery," laughed De Vigne.

Our host actually started; De Vigne certainly did look very little like a pupil of any man's, but he smiled in return.

"Indeed! Then I hope you will often give me the pleasure of your society. There is a billiard-table in wet weather, and good fishing and rabbit-shooting, *faute de mieux*, in the fine. It will be a great kindness, I assure you, to come and enliven us at Weive Hurst a little."

"The kindness will be to us," returned De Vigne, cordially. "Good day to you, Mr. Tressillian; accept my best thanks for your——"

A shower of roses, lilies, and laburnums, pelted at him with a merry ringing laugh, stopped his valedictory harangue. The culprit was a little girl of three years old, standing just outside the low windows of the library—a pretty child, with golden hair waving to her waist, and no end of mischief in her dark blue eyes. Unlike most children, she was not at all frightened at her own misdemeanors, but stood her ground, till Boughton Tressillian stretched out his arm to catch her. Then she turned round and took wing as rapidly as a bird off a bough, with her gold hair streaming behind her, and her clear childish laughter ringing on the summer air. But De Vigne gave chase to the only child in his life he ever deigned to notice, justly thinking them, by-the-by, great nuisances; of course his steps brought him in a second up with her, let her run as fast as she might. and he led her prisoner to the library, holding the wide blue sash by which he had caught her.

"Here is my second captive, Mr. Tressillian—what shall we do to her?"

Boughton Tressillian smiled.

"Alma, how could you be so naughty? Tell this gentleman you are a spoilt child, and ask him to forgive you."

She looked up under her long black lashes half shyly, half wickedly.

"Signor, perdonatemi!" she said, with a mischievous laugh, in broken Italian, though how a little Berkshire girl came to talk Neapolitan instead of English I could not then imagine.

"Alma, you are very naughty to-day," said Tressillian, half impatiently. "Why do you not speak English? Ask his forgiveness properly."

"I will pardon her without it," laughed De Vigne. "There, Alma, will you not love me now?"

She pushed her sunny hair off her eyes and looked at him—a strangely earnest and wistful look, too, for so young a child. I suppose she was pleased with the survey, for she put her little fingers voluntarily into his hand. "Si, Alma vi ama!" she answered him with joyous vivacity, pressing upon him with eager generosity some geraniums the head gardener had given her, and which but a moment ago she had fastened into her little white dress with extreme admiration and triumph.

"Bravo!" said Curly, as, five minutes afterward, we passed out from the great hall door. "You are a brick, De Vigne, and no mistake. How splendidly you pitched into that rascally keeper! Wasn't it no end of a go?"

De Vigne laughed.

"It was a good bit of fun. Always stand up for your rights, my boy; if you don't, who will for you? I never was done yet in my life, and never intend to be."

With which wise resolution the senior pupil struck a fusee and lit his pipe, and we got home just in time to dress, and for De Vigne to hand Arabella in to dinner.

who paid him at all times desperate court, hoping, doubtless, to make such an impression on him with her long ringlets and bravura songs as might trap him in his early youth into such "serious" action as would make her mistress of Vigne and the long rent-roll. That Granville saw no more of her than he could help in common courtesy, and paid her not so much attention as he did to her King Charles, was no check to the young lady's wild imaginings. At eight-and-twenty, women grown desperate don't stick to probabilities, but fly their hawks at any or at all game, so that "peradventure they may catch one."

Weive Hurst proved a great gain to us. Boughton Tressillian was as good as his word, and we were at all times cordially welcomed there. Even us younger ones he liked to have, when the Doctor gave us permission, to shoot and fish and ride about his grounds, and lunch with him afterward on such Strasbourg pâtés and splendid wines as seldom fall even to "private pupils," much less to the lot of ordinary schoolboys, and was never happier than when De Vigne, who had only nominal leave to ask, went over there to dine with him. He grew extremely fond of our senior pupil, who, haughty as he could be at times, and impatient as he was at any of Old Joey's weak attempts at coercion, had a very winning reverential way with old people—played billiards, heard his tales of the times when he was a *lion* with the men of the gay Regency, and broke in his new colts for him, till he fairly won his way into Boughton Tressillian's heart. It was for De Vigne that the butler was always bid to bring the Steinberg and the 1815 port; De Vigne to whom he gave a mare worth five hundred sovereigns, the most beautiful piece of horse-flesh ever mounted; De Vigne who might have knocked down every head of game in the preserves if he had chosen; De Vigne to whom little Alma Tressillian, the old man's

only grandchild, and the future heiress, of course, of Weive Hurst and all its appanages, presented the darling of her heart—a donkey, minus head or tail or panniers.

But De Vigne did not avail himself of the sport at Weive Hurst so much as he might have done had he no other game in hand. His affair with Tressillian's keeper had prevented his going to make impromptu acquaintance with the handsome girl across the Kennet, but she had not slipped from his mind, and had made sufficient impression upon him to induce him to try the next day to see her again in Frestonhills, and find out who she was and where she lived, two questions he soon settled by some means or other greatly to his own satisfaction. The girl's name was Lucy Davis; whence she came nobody knew or perhaps inquired; but now she was one of the hands at a milliner's in Frestonhills, prized by her employers, young as she was, for her extreme talent and skill, though equally detested, I believe, for her tyrannous and tempestuous temper. The girl was handsome enough for an empress, and had a wonderful style in her when she was dressed in her Sunday silks and cashmeres, for dress was her passion, to be "a lady" her ambition—an ambition that would have scrupled at no means to gain its end—and all her earnings were spent in imitating the toilettes she assisted in getting up to adorn the rectors' and lawyers' wives of Frestonhills. "The Davis" was handsome enough to send a much older man mad after her, and De Vigne, after meeting her once or twice in the summer evenings, taking her solitary walks in the deep shady lanes of our green picturesque Berkshire, introduced himself to her, was very graciously received, accompanied her in her strolls, and—fell in love with her, as De Vigne, and, indeed, all his passionate and headstrong race before him, had a knack of doing with every handsome woman who came near him. We all of us

adored the stately, black-eyed, black-browed Lucy Davis, but she never deigned any notice of our boyish worship; and when De Vigne came into the field, we gave up all hope, and fled the scene in desperation. The Doctor, of course, knew nothing of the affair, though almost every one else in Frestonhills did, especially the young bankers and solicitors and grammar-school assistant-masters, who swore at that "cursed fellow at the Chancery" for monopolizing the splendid young milliner—especially as the "cursed fellow" treated them considerably *de haut en bas*. De Vigne was really in love, for the time being, with Lucy Davis; one of those hot, vehement, short-lived attachments natural to his age and character, based on eye-love alone, for the girl had nothing else lovable about her, and had one of the nastiest tempers possible, which she did not always spare even to him, and which, when the first glamour had a little cooled, made De Vigne rather glad than otherwise that his departure from Frestonhills was drawing near some two months after he had seen her across the Kennet, and would give him an opportunity to break with her he otherwise might have found it difficult to make.

How we envied him when the letter on "Her Majesty's Service" came which announced him as gazetted to the — P. W. O. Hussars. That same evening (De Vigne was about to leave the following noon, to stay a week or two with his mother, whom he loved tenderly and fervently) little Curly and I were strolling after dinner, having been sent with a message to a neighboring rector from the Doctor, riding by turns on Miss Arabella's white pony, talking over the coming holidays, "vacation," as Old Joey called them, and of the long, sunny future that stretched before us in dim golden haze, so near and yet so far from our young, longing eyes. I recollect how Curly (bless the boy!) sketched out his life, what a long, joyous life it was to be,

now full he was of trust and eagerness and glad, childish faith in the years that were to come! Poor little Curly!

"Halloa!" he began at last, interrupting himself in his discourse, as De Vigne's terrier jumped up upon us. Here's Punch! Where's your Master, eh boy? There he is, by Jove! Arthur, over the hedge yonder talking to the Davis. What prime fun! I wish I dared to chaff him."

Curly, being on the pony's back, could have a view over the hedge, which was denied to me; and when I climbed up the bank, and swung myself to a similar eminence by means of an elm-bough, I saw at some little distance, under an oak-tree, in a meadow through whose center the Kennet flowed—a favorite place with him to bring a book, and lie smoking in the woody shade—De Vigne and Lucy Davis in very earnest conversation, or rather, it seemed to me, altercation. De Vigne was switching the long meadow grass impatiently with his cane, his cap was drawn down over his forehead, and even at that distance I thought he looked pale and annoyed. The girl Davis stood before him, seemingly in one of those violent furies that reputation attributed to her, and by turns adjuring, abusing, and threatening him.

Curly and I stayed some minutes looking at them, for the scene piqued our interest, making us think of Eugène Sue and Dumas, and all the love scenes we had devoured when the Doctor supposed us plodding at the Pons Asinorum or the De Officiis; but we could make nothing out of it, except that De Vigne and the Davis were quarrelling; and an intuitive perception that the senior pupil would not admire any espionage made me descend from my elm branch, and Curly start off the pony homeward.

That night De Vigne was silent and gloomy in the drawing-room with Arabella and the Doctor; gave us young

ones but a brief "Good night," and shut his bedroom door with a clang; but the next morning he seemed all right again, as he breakfasted for the last time in the old Chancery.

"What a lucky fellow you are, De Vigne," said Curly, as he stood in the hall, waiting for the fly to take him to the station.

He laughed.

"Oh, I don't know! We shall see if we all say so this time twenty years. If I could foresee the future, I wouldn't. I love the glorious uncertainty; it is the only sauce piquante one has, and I can't say I fear fate very much."

How full of fearlessness and pride, spirit and eagerness, and high-mettled courage he looked as he spoke. And well he might at eighteen! Master, when he came of age, of a splendid fortune, his own guide, his own arbiter, able and certain to see life in all its most deliciously attractive forms, with strength of body, talents of a very high order, wit such as would make him in older years as brilliant a conversationalist as Talleyrand, a character fearless, generous, and noble, a face and a form sure to win his way among women; manners, muscle, and brain certain to make him courted and popular among men; truly, it seemed that he, if any one, might trust to the sauce piquante of uncertain fate!

There he went off by the express with his portmanteaus, lettered, as we enviously read, "Granville de Vigne, P. W. O. Hussars;" off with a *Punch* and a Havanna to amuse him on the way—to much more than Exeter Barracks—on the way to Manhood; to all its chances and its changes, its wild revels and its dark regrets, its sparkling champagne cup, and its bitter aconite lying at the dregs.

Off he went, and we, left behind in the dull solitude of academic Frestonhills, so solitary without him, watched the

smoke curling from the engine as it disappeared round the bend of a cutting, and wondered in vague schoolboy fashion what sort of thing De Vigne would make of Life.

III.

“A SOUTHERLY WIND AND A CLOUDY SKY PROCLAIM IT A HUNTING MORNING.”

“CONFOUND it, I can’t cram, and I won’t cram, so there’s an end of it!” sang out a Cantab one fine October morning, flinging Plato’s Republic to the far end of the room, where it knocked down a grind-cup, smashed a punch-bowl, and cracked the glass that glazed the charms of the last pet of the ballet.

The sun streamed through the oriel windows of my rooms in dear old Trinity. The roaring fire crackled, blazed, and chatted away to a slate-colored Skye that lay full length before it. The table was spread with coffee, audit, devils, omelets, hare-pies, and all the other edibles of the buttery. The sunshine within shone on pipes and pictures, tobacco-boxes and little bronzes, books, cards, cigar-cases, statuettes, portraits of Derby winners, and likenesses of modern Helens—all in confusion, tumbled pell-mell together among sofas and easy-chairs, rifles, cricket-bats, and skates. The sunshine without shone on the backs, so fair in spring, and still boasting a certain attractiveness, with their fresh turf, and graceful bridges, and outriggers pulling up and down the cold classic waters of the Cam, more celebrated, but far less clear and lovely, I must say, than our old, dancing rapid, joyous Kennet.

Everything looked essentially jolly, and jolly did I and

my two companions feel smoking before a splendid fire in the easiest of attitudes and couches, a very trifle seedy from a prolonged wine the night previous.

One of them was a handsome young fellow of twenty or so, a great deal too handsome for the peace of the masters' daughters, and of the fair patissières and fleuristes of Petty Cury and King's Parade, known on the rolls as Percy Brandling, second son of Lord Cashingcheque, (a Manchester man, who, having padded himself well with cotton, was rewarded for his industry, or his ingots, by the discerning nation with a spick and span new coronet,) alias "Curly," the self-same, save some additional feet of height and some fondly-cherished whiskers, as our little Curly of Frestonhills. The other was a man of five-and-twenty, his figure having gained in muscle and power without losing one atom in symmetry, showing that his nerve and strength would tell pulling up stream, or in a fast twenty minutes across country, or, if occasion turned up, in that "noble art of self-defense," now growing as popular in England as in days of yore at Elis, where, by the way, manly games found no better defender there than ours do here in our great statesman, long, I hope, to be our Premier, with his wonderful brain and his vernal heart. His features, delicately chiseled, had the stamp of a life full of wild pleasures and strong excitements, but his dark eyes had the fire and the glow of a man whose spirit is unchilled, whose passions have all the vehemence of youth, and to whom existence still offers all that makes existence attractive and worth preserving. As he lay back, swinging himself in a rocking-chair, looking into the *Times* and smoking his favorite Cavendish, the grand air, noticeable even in his boyhood, still more marked now, of course, that his years had been passed in some of the best society of Europe, the clear intellect on his brow and the keen wit on his lips yet

more distinguished from culture and contact with other minds, anybody would have known him in an instant, despite the lapse of time, to be Granville De Vigne, the senior pupil of the bygone days at the old Chancery.

"Cram?" he said, looking up as Curly spoke. "Why should you? What's the good of it? Youth is made for something warmer than academic routine, and knowledge of the world will stand a man in better stead than the quarrels of commentators and the dry demonstrations of mathematicians."

"Of course. Not a doubt about it," said Curly, stretching himself. "I find soda-water and brandy the best guano for the cultivation of my intellect, I can tell you."

"Do you think it will get you a double first?"

"Heaven forefend!" cried Curly, with extreme piety. "I've no ambition for lawn sleeves, though they *do* bring with them as neat a little income as any vessel of grace who lives on clover and forswears the pomps and vanities of this wicked world can possibly desire."

"No," laughed De Vigne; "*you'll* live in clover, my boy, trust you for that. But you won't pretend that you only take it because you're "called" to it, and that you would infinitely prefer, if left to yourself, a hovel and dry bread. Don't cram, Curly; your great saps are like the geese they fatten for our pâtés de foie gras; they overfeed one part of the system till all the rest is weak, diseased, and worthless. But the geese have the best of it, for their livers do make something worth eating, while the reading-man's brains are rarely productive of anything worth writing. A man learns far more knocking about the world, keeping his eyes and ears open, making himself au courant with all the topics of the day, up to all the intellectual and philosophical discussions of his own time, than buried in the dusty tomes of a dead age, shut out from all actual and

practical life, a mere receptacle for the spiritless skeletons of abstruse studies, as the Pyramids for the tenantless coffin of a dead Cheops."

"Ah!" re-echoed Curly, with an envious sigh of assent. "I wonder whose knowledge is worth the most, my old coach, Bosanquet's, a living miracle of classic research, but who couldn't, to save his life, tell you who was Premier, translate '*Comment vous portez-vous?*' or know a Creswick from a Rubens, or yours, who can tell one everything that's going, know English and foreign politics by heart, have read everything that's readable in modern tongues, and have everything at your fingers' ends that one can want to hear about, from the last clause in the budget to the best make in rifles?"

De Vigne laughed. "Well, a man can't tumble about in the world, if he has any brains at all, without learning something; but, my dear fellow, that's all '*superficial*,' they'll tell you; and it is atrociously bad taste to study leading articles instead of Greek unities. '*Chacun à son goût*,' you know. That young fellow above your head is a mild spectacted youth, Arthur says, who gives scientific teas where you give roistering wines, wins Craven scholarships where you get gated, and falls in love with the fair structure of the *Œdipus Tyrannus* where you go mad about the unfortunately more perishable form of that pretty little girl at the cigar-shop over the way. You think him a muff, and he, I day say, looks on you as an *âme damnée*, both in the French and English sense of the words. You both fill up niches in your own little world; you needn't jostle one another. If all horses ran for one cup only, the turf would soon come to grief. Why ain't you like me? I go on my own way, and never trouble my head about other people's vagaries."

"Why am I not like you?" repeated Curly, with a pro-

longed whistle "Why isn't water as good as rum punch, or my bedmaker as pretty as little Rosalie? Don't I just wish I *were* you, instead of a beggarly younger son, tied by the leg in Granta, bothered with chapel, and all sorts of horrors, and rusticated if I try to see the smallest atom of life. By George! De Vigne, what a jolly time you must have had of it since you left Old Joey's!"

"Oh, I don't know," said De Vigne, looking into the fire with a smile. "I've gone the pace, I dare say, as fast as most men, and there are few things I have not tried; but I am not blasé yet, thank Heaven! When other things begin to bore me I turn back to sport, that never palls; there's too much change and verve and excitement in it, the only game, by the way, which does not lose its charm in losing its novelty. Wine one can't drink more than a certain amount of—I can't, at the least—without getting tired of it; women—well, for all the poets write about the joys of constancy, there is no pleasure so great as change *there*, and like the Paris Bohémien, one must go from brunes to blondes, from hazel eyes to blue, 'afin de varier les couleurs;' but in sport one needs no change there; with a good speat in the river, or clever dogs among the turnips, or a fine fox along a cramped country, a man need never be dull; the ping of a bullet, the silver shine of a trout's back, the wild halloo of the finish, never lose their pleasure; one can't say as much for the brightest Rhenish that ever cooled our throats, nor the brightest glances that ever lured us into folly, though Heaven forefend that I should ever say a word against either the Falernian or the Floras of our lives!"

"You'd be a very ungrateful fellow if you did," said I, "seeing that you generally monopolize the very best of both."

He laughed again. "Well, I've seen life—I told you

little fellows at Frestonhills I trusted to my sauce piquante, and I must say it has used me very well hitherto, and I dare say it always will as long as I keep away from the Jews; for, while a man has plenty of tin, all the world offers the choicest hors d'œuvres and entremets for his dinner, till he is sick of them; though, when he has overdrawn at Coutts's, and is starving for a mouthful, his friends wouldn't offer him dry bread or picked bones if they knew it, to keep him out of the union! Be able to dine en prince at home, and you'll be invited out every night of your life—be hungry au troisième, and you must not lick the crumbs from under your sworn allies' tables, those jolly good fellows who have surfeited themselves at *yours* many a time over! Oh yes, I enjoy life; a man always can as long as he can pay for it."

With which axiom De Vigne rose from his rocking-chair, laid down his pipe, and stretched himself.

"It looks fine out yonder—shall we go and have a pull? Our boat club (you know I am stroke of the Grand Blue Jersey B. C.; there are lots of Eton fellows in it) think of challenging your University Eight for love, good-will, and a gold cup. We never do anything for *nothing* in England; if we play, we must play for money or ornaments. I should like to do the things for the sake of the fun, and the sport, and the triumph alone; but that isn't a general British feeling at all. Money is to us all that glory was to the Romans, and military success is to the French. Genius is valued by the money it makes; artists are prized by the price of their pictures. If the nation is grateful once in a hundred years, it votes a pension; and if we want to have a good-humored contest, we must wait till there are subscriptions enough to buy a cup, or a belt, or some other reward to tempt us. Well, come along, Arthur, let's have a pull to keep us in practice."

We accordingly had a pull up that time-honored stream, where Trinity has so often won challenge cups, and luckless King's so often got bumped, thanks to its quasi-Etonian idleness; where grave philosophers have watched the setting sun dying out of the sky, as the glories of their own youth have died away unvalued, till lost forever; where ascetic reading men have mooned along its banks blind to all the loveliness of the water-lily on its waters, or the rose-hued clouds above it, as they took their constitutional and pondered their prize essay; where thousands of brave, and eager, and fearless young hearts have dropped down under its trees in their little boats, dreaming over Don Juan or the Lotus-eaters, or pulled along straining every muscle and every nerve in the great boat race, or sauntered beside it in sweet midsummer eves with some other fair face unmissed to theirs, long forgotten, out of mind now, but which then had power over them to make them oblivious of all things, even of proctors and rustication. We pulled along with hearty good will, aided by an arm which, could we but have had it, we thought, with regretful sighs, to help us in the University race, must have beaten Oxford out-and-out. The Brocas and Little Surley could have told you tales of that slashing stroke; and if, monsieur or madame, you are a "sentimental psychologist," and sneer it down as "animal," let me tell you it is the hand that is strong in sport and in righteous strife that will be warmer in help, and firmer in friendship, and more generous in deed, than the puny weakling's who cannot hold his own.

"By George!" said De Vigne, resting at last upon his oar—"by George! is there anything after all that gives one a greater zest in life than corporeal exertion?"

A sentiment, however, in which indolent Curly declined to coincide. "Give me," said he, "a lot of cushions, a

hookah, a novel, and some Seltzer, and your 'corporeal exertion' may go to the dence for me "

De Vigne laughed; though I dare say, but for the liking he bore him, the young English Sybarite would have had a sharp retort, for De Vigne was not over merciful on the present-day assumption in beardless boys of effeminacy, nil admirarism and blasé indifference to all things. He was far too frank himself for affectation, and too spirited for ennui; at the present, at least, his sauce piquante had not lost its flavor.

Yet he had seen life, as he had told us himself, in all its phases, both in the glare of the most brilliant footlights, and in the darkest gloom, behind its coarsely-painted scenes. But life had hitherto been full of dashing excitements and highly-tinted pleasures to him; the *parfaits* of fortune are usually the darlings of women, though we know their love is so disinterested; and no man finds the worse friends because he gives them first-rate wine, and prime Manillas, and lends them a cool hundred when they want it, never missing and never remembering it. Besides these adventitious advantages of wealth and position, De Vigne was a man sure to find life very pleasant, at least on his entrance to it; women delighted in the restless and vehement nature which yielded them a worship, if short-lived so much more passionate, than they found ordinarily in their lovers out of romances; and men were certain to like him for his candor, his high spirit, his fearless courage, his generous honor, and his intellect, clear, comprehensive, and stored with all the knowledge of the day.

He *had* seen life; he had hunted with the Pytchley, stalked royals in the Highlands, flirted with maids of honor, given suppers to premières danseuses, had dinners fit for princes at the Star and Garter, and petits soupers in cabinets particuliers at Véfour's and Tortoni's. He and

his yacht, when he got leave, had gone everywhere that a yacht could go; the Ionian Isles knew no figure-head better than his Aphrodite's; it had carried him up to salmon fishing in Norway, and across the Atlantic to hunt buffaloes and caribboos; to Granada, to look into soft Spanish faces by the dim moonlight in the Alhambra; and to Venice, to fling bouquets upward to the balconies, and whisper to Venetian masks that showed him the glance of long almond eyes, in the riotous Carnival time. He had had a brief campaign in Scinde, where he was wounded in the hip, and tenderly nursed by a charming civil service widow; where his daring drew down upon him the admiring rebuke of his commanding officer, and won him his troop, which promotion had brought him back to England and enabled him to exchange into the —— Lancers, technically the Dashers, the best *nom de guerre* for that daring and brilliant corps. And now De Vigne, who had never lost sight of me since the Frestonhill's days, but, on the contrary, often asked me to go and shoot over Vigne when he assembled a whole crowd of guests in that magnificent mansion, had now, having a couple of months' leave, run down to Newmarket for the October Meeting, and had come at my entreaty to spend a week in Granta, where, I need not tell you, we fêted him, and did him the honors of the place in no bad style.

“Crash! crash! went the relentless chapel bell the next morning, waking us out of dreamless slumber that had endured not much more than an hour, owing to a late night of it with a man at John's over punch and *vingt-et-un*; and we had to tumble out of bed and rush into chapel, twisting on our coats and swearing at our destinies as we went. The Viewaway, the cleverest pack in the easterly counties, though not, I admit, up to the Burton, or Tedworth, or Melton mark, met that day for the first run of

the season at Euston Hollows, five miles from Cambridge, and Curly, who overcame his love of the dolce on such occasions, staggered into his stall, the pink dextrously covered with his surplice, his bright hair for once in disorder, and his blue eyes most unmistakably sleepy. "Who'd be a hapless undergrad? That fellow De Vigne's dreaming away in comfort, while we're dragged out by the heels for a lot of confounded humbug and form," lamented Curly to me, as we entered. The readers hurried the prayers over in that sing-song recitative in favor with college-men, which is a cross between the drone of a gnat and the whine of a Suffolk peasant; it's meant to be, I presume, as indeed I think it's called, "intoning." We young fellows dozed comfortably, sitting down and getting up at the right times by sheer force of habit, or read Dumas or Balzac under cover of our prayer-books. The freshmen alone tried to look alive and attentive; we knew it was but a ritual, much such an empty but time-honored one as the gathering of Fellows at the Signing of the Leases at King's, or any other moss-grown formula of Mater, and attempted no such thing, and rushed out of chapel again, the worse instead of the better for the ill-timed devotions, which forced us, in our thoughtless youth, into irreverence and hypocrisy, a formula as absurd, as soulless, and as sad to see as the praying windmills of the Hindoos, at which those "heads of the Church," who uphold morning chapel as the sole safeguard of Granta, smile in pitying derision.

When I got back to my rooms I found breakfast waiting, and De Vigne standing on the hearth-rug tickling my Skye with his riding-whip, looking as gallant and as "game" in his scarlet hunting suit as any knight of old could do in hauberks and in mail, even if those gentry had been what Froissart and Commines, when we read them for the first time, would fain make us think and hope.

Audit and hare-pie had not much temptation for us that morning. We were soon in saddle, and off to Euston Hollows; and after a brisk gallop to cover, we found ourselves riding up the approach to the M. F. H.'s house, where the meet was to be held. The house—or rather incongruous pile of Elizabethan architecture with Crystal Palace-like conservatories, which made it at once the idol and horror of the Archæological Society—stood well on a rising ground, (the only rising ground, you will say, in that flat county,) and the master of it, who had lately married as pretty a girl as any man could want to see, was slightly known to De Vigne, and well known to us, a frank, high-spirited, highly-cultivated man—*en un mot*, an English gentleman, in the perfection of those meaning words. The meet took place in an open sweep of grassland belted with trees, just facing the hall, and there were gathered all the men of the Viewaway, mounted on powerful hunters, and looking all over like goers. There was every type of the genus sporting man,—stout, square farmers, with honest bull-dog physique, characteristic of John Bull plebeian; wild young Cantabs, mounted showily from livery-stables, with the fair, fearless, delicate features characteristic of John Bull patrician; steady old whippers-in, very suspicious of brandy; wrinkled feeders, with stentorian voices that the wildest puppy had learned to know and dread; the courteous, cordial, aristocratic M. F. H., with the men of *his* class, the county gentry, rough, ill-looking cads, awkward at all things save crossing country; no end of pedestrians, nearly run over themselves, and falling into everybody's way; and last, but you are very sure, in our eyes, not least, the ladies who had come to see the hounds throw off at Euston Hollows.

De Vigne exchanged his reeking hack for his own hunter, a splendid gray thorough-bred, with as much light

action, he said, as a danseuse, and as much strength and power as a bargeman. Then he and we rode up to talk to Mrs. L'Estrange, the M. F. H.'s wife, whom everybody called Flora, who was mounted on a beautiful little mare, and intended to follow her husband and his hounds over the Cambridge fences.

"Who is that lady yonder?" asked De Vigne, after he had chatted some moments with her.

"The one on the horse with a white star on his forehead? Lady Blanche Fairelesyeux. Don't you know her? She is a widow, and a very pretty and rich one, too."

"Yes, yes, I know Lady Blanche," laughed De Vigne. "She married old Faire two years ago, and persuaded him to drink himself to death most opportunely. No, I meant that very handsome woman there, talking to your husband at this moment, mounted on a chestnut with a very wild eye."

"Oh, that is Miss Trefusis!"

"And can you tell me no more than her mere name?"

"Not much. She is some relation—what I do not know exactly—of that detestable old woman Lady Fantyre, whose 'recollections' of court people are sometimes as gross anachronisms as the Comte de St. Germain's. They are staying with Mrs. St. Croix, and she brought them here; but I do not like Miss Trefusis very much myself, and Cecil—Mr. L'Estrange—does not wish me to cultivate her."

"Then I must not ask you to introduce me?" said De Vigne, disappointedly.

"Oh yes, if you wish. I know her well enough for that; and she dines here to-night with the St. Croix. But there is a wide difference, you know, between making passing acquaintances and ripening them into friends. Come.

Captain de Vigne, I am sure you will ride the hounds off the scent, or do something dreadful, if I do not let you talk to your new beauty," laughed the young mistress of Euston Hollows, turning her mare's head toward the showy chestnut, whose rider had won so much of De Vigne's admiration.

She was as dashing and magnificent in her way as her horse in his: a tall and voluptuously-perfect figure, which her tight dark riding-jacket showed in all the beauty of its rounded outlines, falling shoulders, and small waist, while her little hat, with a single white ostrich feather falling down and mingling with the dark massive braids of her hair, scarcely shadowed and did not conceal her face, with its singularly handsome features, clear aquiline profile, magnificent eyes, and lips by which Valasquez or Vandyke would have sworn, though they were too haughty, and too indicative of an imperious and unyielding nature to please me. Splendid she was, and she had spared no pains to make the tableau; and though, to a keen eye, her brilliant color, which was *not* rouge, and her penciled eyebrows, which *were* tinted, gave her a trifle of the actress or the lorette style, there was no wonder that De Vigne, impassible as a Southern by women's beauty—and at that time, as long as it *was* beauty, not caring much of what stamp or of what order—was not easy till Flora L'Estrange had introduced him to Constance Trefusis. So we rush upon our doom! So we, in thoughtless play, twist the first gleaming and silky threads of the fatal cord that will cling about our necks, fastened beyond hope of release, as long as our lives shall last! Constance Trefusis, surrounded as she was by the best men of the Viewaway, ruling them by force of that superb form and face—not by wit or conversation, for she had not overmuch of that, save a shrewd sarcastic rejoinder now and then—bowed very graciously

to De Vigne, and smiled upon him with her rose-hued lips. He had caught her eyes upon him once or twice before he had asked Mrs. L'Estrange who she was; and now, displacing the others with that calm, unconscious air of superiority, the more irritating to his rivals that it was invariably successful, he leaned his hand on the pommel of her saddle, and talked away to her on the chit-chat of the hour, which, however commonplace the subject, he knew how to treat so as to give it a piquance and an interest quite foreign to itself.

The Trefusis, as all the men called her, intended to follow the hounds, as well as L'Estrange's wife and Lady Blanche Fairelesyeux, (the little widow being well known in most hunting countries, and having more than once seen the finish in Leicestershire and Northamptonshire runs;) so De Vigne and his new acquaintance rode off together as the hounds, symmetrical in form, and all in good condition, though they *were* a provincial establishment, trotted away, with waving sterns and eager eyes, to draw the Euston Hollows covert. "Will Trefusis or Reynard win the day?" I wondered, as I saw De Vigne pay much more attention to the white teeth and oriental eyes of his handsome Amazon than to the fidgety gambols of his gray Berwick.

There was not long much doubt about it. The cheery "Halloo!" rang over coppice and brushwood and plantation, the white sterns of the dogs flourished among the dark-brown bushes of the cover, the mellow horn rang out in joyous triumph, stentorian lungs shouted out the delicious "Stole away!—hark for-r-r-rard!" and as the finest fox in the county broke away, De Vigne stuck his spurs into his hunter's flanks, and rattled down the cover, all his thoughts centered on the clever little pack that streamed along before him; and the whole field burst away over the low parterres and oak fences and ox-rails, across which the

fox was leading us. I dashed along the three first meadows, only divided by low hedges that a Shetland could have taken with all the excitement and breathlessness of a first start; but as we crossed the fourth at an easy gallop, cooling the horses before the formidable leap which we knew the Cam, or rather a narrow sedgy tributary of it, would give us at the bottom of it, I took breath, and looked around. Before any of us, De Vigne was going along as straight as an arrow's flight, working Berwick up for the approaching trial, never looking back, gone into the sport before him as if he never had had, and never could have had, any other interest in life. The Trefusis, riding as few women could, sitting well down in her saddle, like any of the Pytchley or Belvoir men, was some yards behind him, "riding jealous," I could see; rather a hopeless task for a young lady with a man known in the hunting-field as Granville was. The M. F. H. was, of course, handling his hunter like the masterly whip he was, his little wife keeping gallantly up with him, though she and her mare, so slight and so graceful were they, looked as likely to be smashed by the first staken-bound fence as a Sèvres figure or a Parian statuette. Curly, who, thanks to his half-broken hunter, had split four strong oak bars, and been once pitched neck and crop into Cambridge mud, was coming along with his pink sadly stained, but his pluck game as ever. Lady Blanche and four of the men were within a few paces of him, while the rest of the field were scattered far and wide: quaint bits of scarlet, green, and black dotting the short brown turf of the pasture land.

Splash went the fox into the sedgy water of this branch of classic Cam, and scrambled up upon the opposite bank. For a second the hounds lost the scent; then they threw up their heads with a joyous challenge, breasted the stream, dashed on after him, and sped along beyond the pollards

on the opposite side far ahead of us, streaming along like the white tail of a comet. De Vigne put his gray at the yawning ditch, but before he could lift him over it the Trefusis, striking her chestnut savagely, cleared it with unblanched cheek and unshaken nerve. She looked back with a laugh, not of gay girlish merriment, such as Flora L'Estrange would have done, but a laugh with a certain scorn and gratified malice in it, and he gave a muttered oath at being cut down by a woman as he landed his grey beside her, and dashed onward.

I cleared it, so did the M. F. H., and, by some species of sporting miracle, so did his wife and her little mare. Sworn to the chase as the gallant master of the Viewaways was, he could not help now and then turning his head with a word of admonition or advice to his plucky little Flora; a weakness for which I, being about half his age, and, consequently, much more up to life and steeled to women, regarded him with consummate contempt. One of the yeomen found a watery bed among the tadpoles, clay, and rushes—it might be a watery grave, for anything I know to the contrary—and poor dear Curly was tumbled straight off his young one, and he and his horse lay there, a helpless mass of human and equine flesh, while Lady Blanche lifted her roan over him, with a gay, unsympathizing “Keep still, or Mazeppa will damage you!”

The run had lasted but ten minutes and a half as yet, and the hounds, giving tongue in jôyous concert, led the way for those who could follow them, over blackthorn hedges, staken-bound fences, and heavy-plowed lands, while the fox was heading for Sifton Wood, where, once lodged, we should never unearth him again. We could not see him, but the dogs never once lost scent, and on we went at a killing pace, De Vigne, happy fellow! riding on before any of us even before the Trefusis, by two lengths.

Half a mile before Sifton Wood there was a cramped and awkward leap; a high, stiff, straggling hedge, with a ditch—confound the Cambridge ditches!—Heaven knows how wide, immediately before it, almost as bad as a Leicestershire bullfinch, a leap to tax a man's skill and his horse's powers, and which a woman might pardonably fear, with all the courage in the world. Absorbed as I was in working up my hunter for the leap, I looked to see if the Trefasis funked it. Not she; and she cleared it, too, lifting her chestnut high in the air, over the ugly blackthorn boughs; but on the other side the chestnut fell forward, and stumbled on his head, so they told me afterward. The courtly M. F. H. stopped to offer her assistance, but she waved him on. De Vigne (will he lose your liking, mademoiselle?) had forgotten his chivalry in the chase, and dashed straight on without looking back; while, picking up her hunter, the Trefasis remounted and rode forward with damaged habit but undaunted spirit. Lady Blanche's Mazeppa refused the leap; and with a little petulant French oath she rode farther down, to try and find a gap; and my luckless underbred one flung me over his head, rolling on his back, and looking piteous to the last extremity in his improvised couch of rushes, nettles, mud, and duckweed, and before either he or I could pick ourselves up and shake off the humiliating slough, the fox was killed, and the glorious whoop of triumph came ringing far over plantations and pastures, on the clear October air.

With not a few anathemas on the cruel fate that had shut me out from the honors of the finish, I rode through the gap lower down that Lady Blanche had found, and made my way to those luckier mortals who had had the glory of being in at the death. The brush had been awarded to De Vigne by the old huntsman, who might have given it to the Trefasis, for she was but a yard or two

behind him; but Squib had no tenderness for the sex; indeed, he looked on them as having no earthly business in the field, and gave it with a gruff word of compliment to Granville, who of course handed it to Miss Trefusis, but claimed the right of sending it up to town to be mounted in ivory and gold for her. That dashing Amazon herself sat on her trembling and foam-covered chestnut with the dignity and royal beauty of Cynisca, returning from the Olympian games; and De Vigne seemed to think nothing more attractive than this haughty, triumphant, imperial Constance, who had skill and pluck worthy a Pythley Nestor. *I* preferred little Flora's girlish pity for the "poor dear fox," and her pathetic lamentation to her husband that she "dearly loved the riding, but she would rather never see the finish." However, as De Vigne said the morning before, *chacun à son goût*; if we all liked the same style of woman, where should we be? We rival and jostle and hate each other enough as it is about that center of all mischief, the beau sexe, Heaven knows!

We had another run that day, but it was a very slow affair. We killed the fox, but he made scarcely any running at all, and we might have scored it almost as a blank day but for our first glorious twenty minutes, one of the fastest things I ever knew, from Euston Hollows to Sifton Wood. Lady Blanche went back in ill-humor; missing that ditch had put the pretty widow in dudgeon for all day; but Flora L'Estrange and her little mare, which merited its name *Petite*, kept with us all the time, and Constance Trefusis—well, it's my firm conviction that Mazepa's gallop would not have tired that woman, and she rode, as De Vigne observed admiringly to me, with as firm a seat and as strong a hand as any rough-rider's. Excellence in his own art pleased him, I suppose, for he watched her more and more, and rode back to Euston Hollows with her

through the gloaming, some nine miles from where the last fox was killed, looking down on her haughty beauty with bold, tender glances.



PART THE SECOND.

I.

THE PATTE DE VELOURS STRIKES ITS FIRST WOUND IN THE ACADEMIC SHADES OF GRANTA.

L'ESTRANGE had bid us send our things over to his house, and make our toilettes there, after the day's sport; and after we had had what refection we preferred, (we had all scorned luncheon that morning, save the sherry Flora had drunk from her husband's flask and the cherry brandy the Trefusis had condescended to take out of De Vigne's, with a cigar from his case, after the Sifton Wood run,) we were glad to perform our ablutions, and get out of Cambridge mud into dinner toilettes. When at last we went down into the drawing-room, we found Constance Trefusis in black tulle, with crimson fuchsia and japonica flung here and there on the skirt, and crimson flowers on her superb jetty braids, sitting on an amber satin couch, queening it over the county men, a few college fellows or professors, and the borough and county members. There was Mrs. St. Croix and her two daughters, showy, flighty, hawked-about women, and the Gwyn-Erlens, fresh, nice-looking girls, with whom Mrs. L'Estrange seemed to fraternize immensely; and Lady Blanche, recovered from her ill-humor, and ready to shoot down any game, worth or not worth the hitting; and the Countess of Turquoise, who thought very few people knew what fun was, she told me, and instanced the dreary social torture called dining out,

and Mrs. Fitzrubric, a bishop's wife, staying in the neighborhood, who considered the practice of giving buns at school feasts sensual, but showed no disrelish for champagne and mock turtle; and there was that "detestable old woman," according to Flora, the Lady Fantyre, widow of an Irish peer, a little, shriveled, witty, nasty-thinking, and amusing-talking old lady, with a thin, sharp face, a hooked nose, very keen, bright, cunning, quizzical eyes, a very candid wig, and unmistakable rouge, who chattered away in a shrill treble of intimate acquaintance with court celebrities, some of whom, certainly, she could never have known, for the best of reasons, that they were dead before she was born, and who, having seen a vast deal of life, not all of the nicest, and picked up a good deal of information, passed current in nine cases out of ten, with her apocryphal stories and well-worn title, which covered, on disaît, a multitude of sins, as coronets do and charity doesn't, but was "not visited" where her departed lord's rank might have entitled her to be, partly because she had a rather too marked skill at cards, chiefly, I have no doubt, because she had no heavy balance at any bank, the only bank from which she ever drew being the Homburg and the Baden, and was obliged to live by her wits, those wits being represented by the four honors and the odd trick. If poor old Fantyre had had a half million or so at Barclay's, I dare say the charitable world would have let her buy oblivion for all the naughty secrets hidden in her old wigged head!

"Diana turned to Venus, and no mistake," whispered Curly to me, as we looked at the Trefusis, her beauty heightened by her skill in her toilette, which was as tasteful as a Parisienne's, and would have chimed in with all M. Chevreul's artistic notions. De Vigne, the moment he entered, crossed over to her, and, seating himself, began to talk; and whether the lustrous gaze of his eyes, which

knew how to express their admiration, got their admiration returned, or whether she had wit enough to appreciate the superiority of his conversation, where the true gold of real sense and talent rang out in distinction to the second-hand platitudes and *Punch*-cribbed mots of the generality of people, I will not pretend to decide. At any rate, by some spell or other he distanced his rivals by many lengths, though I do not think, then, he cared very much about doing it, beyond liking to have the handsomest woman in the room to himself. They naturally spoke of the run of that morning, and Constance Trefusis, flirting her fan with stately movement, and turning her full glittering eyes upon him, asked, "Captain De Vigne, what do you think you did this morning that pleased me?"

De Vigne expressed his happiness that any act of his should do so.

"It was when we took that ditch by Sifton Wood, and my stupid chestnut fell with me. You rode on, and never looked back; your thoughts were with the hounds, not with me."

"You are more forgiving to my discourtesy than I can be to myself," smiled De Vigne. "What you are so generous as to pardon I cannot recall without shame."

"Then you are very silly," she interrupted him. "A man in a time of excitement or danger should have something better to think about than a woman."

"It is difficult, with Miss Trefusis before us, to think there *can* be anything better than a woman," whispered De Vigne.

She looked at him and smiled, too, with something of the malice in it as when she cleared the Cam before him—a smile that at once repulsed and fascinated, annoyed and piqued him. Just then the dinner was announced. L'Es-trange took away my bewitching Countess of Turquoise,

with whom, in five minutes, I had gone straight off into love for her beaux yeux. Curly led in Julia St. Croix, with whom he seemed wonderfully struck. Heaven knows why, except that young fellows will go down before any battered or war-worn arrows at times. Little Flora was victimized by Turquoise himself, a vain, dull, stupid owl, and wished, I believe, in her secret heart, that social laws allowed her to go in with her beloved Cecil, (she was very young, remember, madame; we do not expect any such bêtises from you;) and De Vigne gave his arm to the Trefusis, to whom he talked during all the courses with a dévouement that must have interfered with his proper appreciation of the really masterly productions of the Euston Hollows chef, and the very excellent hock and claret of L'Estrange's cellar. Whether he had much response I cannot say—I was too absorbed in looking at Lady Turquoise from far too respectful a distance to please me—I should fancy not, for the Trefusis was never, that I heard, much famed for conversation; but some way or other she fascinated him with her basilisk beauty, and when Flora gave the move she looked into his eyes rather warmly for an acquaintance not twelve hours old as yet. We were some little time before we followed them, for De Vigne and L'Estrange and the members got on the Reform Bill, and Granville and our host being the only two Liberals against a whole troop of Conservatives, they did not get off it again in a hurry; and though Lady Turquoise was bewitching, and the Trefusis' eyes magnificent, and the St. Croix very effective as they sang duets in studied poses, Château Margaux and unfettered talk were more attractive to us, ungallant though it might be. When we returned to the drawing-rooms, De Vigne took up his station beside the Trefusis again, and, throwing his arm over the back of her chair, bent down till his whiskers almost touched

the crimson wreath upon her hair, paying her strikingly marked attention, while Flora L'Estrange sang charming little French chansons, and the St. Croix tortured us with bravuras, and that cruel Countess of Turquoise flirted with the county member. What an intolerably empty-headed coxcomb, he seemed to me, I remember!

"What a fine creature that Trefusis is!" said De Vigne, as he drove us back to Cambridge in a dog-cart. "On my life, she is a magnificent woman! Arthur, she reminds me of somebody or other—I can't tell whom—somebody, I dare say, I saw in Spain or in Italy, or in India, perhaps."

"Shall I tell you," said Curly.

"Yes, pray do; but you've never been about with me, old boy, how should you know?"

"I was with you at the Chancery, and I haven't forgotten Lucy Davis."

"Lucy Davis!" exclaimed De Vigne, the light of old days breaking in upon him, half faded, half familiar. "By Jove! she is something like that girl. I declare I had forgotten that schoolboy episode, Curly. So she *is* like her—if Lucy had been a lady instead of a dressmaker. The deuce! I hadn't bad taste then, boy as I was. How many things of that kind one has and forgets!"

"Lucy didn't look like a woman who'd allow herself to be forgotten. She'd make you remember her by fair means or foul," said Curly.

"What! do you recollect her so well, young one?" laughed De Vigne. "She seems to have made more impression upon you than, I must say, she has done on me. There was the very devil in that girl, poor thing, young as she was. She was bold, bad, hardened to the core, I am afraid. Child as she was, she could entice to perfection, but of loving she had no more notion than a stone,

and yet she was at an age when girls *do* love, or rather fancy they do, if ever they will in their lives. Faugh! the broken hearts and the betrayed affections poets and parsons weep over, and women and newspapers lay upon our backs, where do we find them? Do you suppose the first step to *Lais's* sins or *Messalina's* depravities was Love? I vow it is too bad to stick on to the grande passion all the blame of vain, coarse, avaricious, finery-loving women's errors, nine-tenths of whom never *could* have loved anything but gold, or dress, or their own faces. Pshaw! the sentiment that goes about in our day would sicken a cat, if brutes were not too wise to lend their ears to all the bosh of humankind. But about this Trefusis, Curly. She does bring that girl to my mind, certainly, and there is in her something there was in Lucy Davis—a something intangible which repels, while her exterior beauty allures. Perhaps it is in both alike—a cold heart within.”

“If we were only allured where there are warm hearts, we should keep in a blessed state of indifference,” said I, thinking savagely of Lady Turquoise and that *confounded* county member.

“Hallo, Arthur! what has turned you cynic?” laughed De Vigne. “Only this very morning were you sentimentalizing over the ‘Lady of Shalott,’ and wanting to inflict it on me.”

“Yes, and you stopped me with the abominable quotation, ‘Ass! am I *onion*-eyed?’”

“Well, that showed two things in my favor: first, that I’d read Shakspeare—thank God for him!—and, second, that I haven’t atrocious taste enough to call your sentimental mannerists of the present day by the highest title I can give Ben Jonson’s ‘Dear Willie’—Poet. Confound it, how dark it is! Is that a milestone, or a ghost? Whatever it is, the mare doesn’t admire it. Gently, old girl!—quiet! quiet!”

"I say, De Vigne," said Curly, when the mare had come down on her forelegs again, and consented to trot onward, "I wish you'd tell us how that affair with Lucy Davis ended! Chevasney and I saw you quarreling the day before you left."

"I never quarreled," said De Vigne, contemptuously. "I never do with anybody; if they don't say what I like, I tell them my mind at once, and there's an end of it; but quarreling's a nasty, petty, jangling, lowering sort of thing. I never quarrel! Let me see, what did happen that day? I remember: I met Lucy that evening as I was going into Frestonhills, and when I told her I was about to leave, she demanded—what do you think?—nothing less than a promise of marriage! Only fancy—from me to her! She even said I had made her one. I couldn't have done, you know. I've been guilty of many mad things, but never of one quite so insane as that. I told her flatly it was a lie—so it was, and it put me in a passion to be saddled with such an atrocious falsehood. I never can stand quietly and see people trying to chisel me, you know. I told her it was a falsehood, and she could not go on asserting it; so, like most people when they are in the wrong, but won't admit it, she went off into one of those virago storms of hers, of which I had already experienced enough to sicken me. I offered to do anything she liked for her; to provide for her in any way she chose; and so I would, for I was quite a boy, and really pitied her from my soul for being unprovided for and unprotected at so early an age. But not a word would she hear from me; she was mad, I suppose, because she could not startle or chicane me into admitting the promise of marriage, having possibly in her eye the heavy damages an enlightened court would grant to her 'innocent years' and her 'wrongs!' At any rate, she would not hear a word I said, but she poured her in-

vectives into my ear, letting out that she had never loved me, but had intended to make me a stepping-stone to the money and rank she was always pining after; that, having failed, she hated me—she spoke the truth there, I believe—and that before she died she would be revenged on me. Heaven knows what she did *not* say; I can't recollect half; but being very young then, and not used to violent-tempered women, and having had besides a boy's hot, blind, and generous attachment to her for the time, when she left me with something very like curses, I remember I stood there with a curious chill over me, half of belief in her threats of vengeance, half of the disappointment that, when one grows older, one gets used to, as a matter of course, but, when one is new to life, gives one sharp twinges—in being betrayed, and finding our fancied angels turn out devils, and very spiteful, false-hearted devils too. So Lucy Davis and I parted, and that is the last I heard of or from her. Though she did hate me so, she liked my shawls, and my jewelry, and little things I had given her, well enough to keep them; or rather, no doubt they were all she had liked me for, I should say. I wonder what has become of her? It's easy enough to conjecture, poor creature!"

"Ah, I wonder!" responded Curly. "By George! what an amusing idea to think of her revenging herself upon you. She'd be puzzled to do it, I fancy."

"Rather," laughed De Vigne, reining up his mare; "but women say anything in a passion. Lucy Davis had gone straight out of my mind till you said that handsome Trefusis made you think of her. I am glad the St. Croix and L'Estranges are coming to lunch with you, Curly; I want to see more of my imperial Constance, and must be back at Vigne by Saturday. Sabretasche, and Pigott, and Severn, and no end of men are coming down for the pheasants. I wish you were there too, old fellows. Good night!

Au revoir!" And De Vigne set us down before old Trinity, and drove on to the Bull, where he was staying, smoking, and thinking, very likely, of Constance Trefusis.

Oh, those jolly Cambridge days! The Inchley Grind that I won by a neck, distancing Biddulph, of Christ's, who made so *very* sure of himself and his horse; the splendid manner in which we bumped Corpus and Katherine Hall, and carried off the Challenge Cup, to the envy of all the University; the row and scuffle of Town and Gown rows, dear to the inborn British passion for hard hits, where Curly knocked a cobbler down and then gave him in charge for assault; the skill with which that mischievous young Honorable caught his whip round the shovel-hat of a dean, raising that venerated article of dress in mid-air, only escaping rustication by dashing on with his tandem-team too quickly for identification,—were they not all written in their day among the records of Trinity men's larks?

We used to vow we were confoundedly tired of Granta, and so I dare say we might feel at the time, but how pleasant they were, those light-hearted college days!—the honors of the Eight-oar; the thrashing of the Marylebone Eleven; the rattle cross country for the Cesarewitch or the Cambridge Sweepstakes; the flirtations of pretty shop-girls in Petty Cury or Trumpington Street; the raving politics of the Union, occasional prelude to triumphs forensic and senatorial; the noisy epicureanism of wines, where scanty humor woke more merriment than wittiest mots twenty years after, and Cambridge port passed with a flavor that no olives or anchovies can give to comet claret now. How pleasant they were those jolly college days! As I think of them, how many kindly faces and joyous voices rise before me! Where are they now? Some lying with the colors on their breast beside the Euxine Sea and along the line of the Pacific; some struck down by the assassin's

knife in the temples at Cawnpore; some sleeping in eternal sleep beneath the sighing of the Delhi palms, or the sad rhythm of the Atlantic waves; some wasting classic eloquence on country hinds in moss-grown village churches; some fighting the great fight between science and death in the crowded hospital wards of London; some wearing honor, and honesty, and truth from their hearts in the breathless up-hill press of the great world;—all of them, living or dead, scattered far away about the earth, since the days when in our unspent strength and our undamped spirits, and our wild, wayward, careless youth, we lived in the shadow of the gray academic walls!

The time to lionize Cambridge, as everybody knows, is May and June, when the backs are in all their sylvan glory, when the graceful spires of King's rise up against the fair blue skies, only shadowed by fleecy clouds, the white towers of John's stand bosomed in green leafy shades, the Trinity limes fill the air with fragrance, the sun peers through the great shadowy elm-boughs of Neville's Court, and the brown Cam flows under its graceful bridges, with water-lilies and forget-me-nots on its breast, gliding with subdued murmur, as though conscious that it was in classic shades, through vistas of waving boughs, past gray, stately college walls, bringing into the grave haunts of learning the glad and vernal freshness of the spring. May is the time for Cambridge; still, even in October, we managed to give the L'Estranges and the St. Croix a very good reception. Women are sure to be royally *fêtées* by Cantabs, and our guests were calculated to excite the envy of all the University. Flora L'Estrange was pretty enough to bewitch Newton from his pedestal; Lady Blanche (whose dower house was but a mile or two from Euston Hollows) came with them, and to get a sight of the widow all Granta would have turned out any day. The two St. Croix were

dashing woman, and I have told you before all that Constance Trefusis was in form and feature. We did the lions with very little architectural appreciation, but the science of eyes and smiles is a pleasanter one any day than the science of styles and orders; and we were quite as contented, and I have no doubt much better amused, than if, Ruskin à la main, we had been competent to pull to pieces the beauty of King's, and prate of "severity" and "purity." Happy in our barbarianism, we crossed the Bridge of Sighs with a laugh at old Fantyre's jokes, strolled down the Fellowship Walk, telling Julia St. Croix, who had not two ideas in her head, that Bacon's Gate would to a surety fall down on her; went in at Humility, through Virtue, and out at Honor, flirting desperately under those grave archways, and hurried irreverently through the libraries, where reading men, cramming in niches, looked up, forgetting their studies at the rustle of Lady Blanche's silk flounces, and Thorwaldsen's Byron seemed to glance with Juanesque admiration at the superb eyes of the Trefusis as she lifted them to that statue, which does indeed, as the poet himself averred, make a shocking nigger of him.

"How strange it seems to me," said De Vigne, as, entering King's Chapel, we brushed against one of the senior Fellows, who had dozed away in college chambers all the beauty and prime of his life—"how incomprehensible, that men can pass a whole existence in the sort of chrysalis state of which one sees so much in university walls. That fellow is a King's man; he obtained his fellowship by right, his degree without distinction. He lives on, fuddling his small brains—for small they must be, as he has never worked them since he got his Eton captaincy—with port, and playing solemn rubbers, and eating heavy dinners, till a living falls as fat as his avarice can desire. He has no

thoughts, no ambition, no home, no sphere beyond the academic pale, and no sympathy with the heart-throbs of warmer, stronger human nature."

"And no love, I dare say, save audit, and no mistress save turtle-soup," laughed Flora L'Estrange.

"Perhaps he had once, one whom her own will, or his own egotism, gendered by the selfish creed taught by the celibate obligation of the fellowship system, parted from him long ago," said Curly, with a tender glance at that very practical-minded flirt, Julia St. Croix.

"That's right, Curly," said De Vigne, amusedly, "make a romance of it. Fellows of colleges, with snuff and whist, and dry routine, are such appropriate subjects for sentiment! But after all, Miss Trefusis, that man is not a greater marvel to me than one of those classical scholars who is nothing *but* a classical scholar, such as one meets here and in Oxford, binding down his ambitions to the elucidation of a dead tongue, exhausting his energies in the evolving of decayed philosophies, spending, as Pelham says, 'one long school-day of lexicons and grammars,' his memory the charnel-house for the bones of a lifeless language, his brain enacting the mechanical rôle of a dictionary or an encyclopedia, living all his life without human aspirations or human sympathies, and in his death leaving no void among men, not missed even by a dog."

"It would not suit you?" asked the Trefusis, smiling.

"No, no," chuckled the old Fantyre to herself, "he'll have his pleasure, I take it, cost him what it may."

"I!" echoed De Vigne, "chained down to the limits of a commentator's studies or a Hellenist's labors! Heaven forbid! I love excitement, action, change; a mill-wheel monotony would be the death of me. I would rather have storms to encounter, than no movement to keep me alive."

"Are you so changeable, then?"

"Well, yes, I fancy I am. At least, I never met anything that could chain me long as yet."

He laughed as he spoke, leaning against one of the stalls, the sun streaming through the rich stained glass full upon his face, with its delicate aristocratic features, and his dark lustrous eyes gleaming with amusement at a thousand reminiscences evoked by her speech. The Trefusis looked at him with a curious smile, perhaps of will to chain the restless and wayward spirit, perhaps of pique at his careless words, perhaps of longing to conquer and to win him; it might have been hate, but—it certainly was not love. Still, Flora L'Estrange, who was a clever little thing, whispered to her husband,—

"Miss Trefusis will win Captain De Vigne if she can."

L'Estrange laughed, and looked at Granville and his companion, as they were, in appearance, discussing the subjects of the storied windows of Holy Henry's chapel, but talking, I fancy, of other topics than sacred art or history.

"Quite right, my pet, but I hope she *won't*. I would as soon see him marry a tigress."

Tired of lionizing, we soon returned to Curly's rooms, where you are sure the most recherché luncheon that could be had out of Cambridge shops and Trinity buttery, with London wine, and game from his governor's preserves, was ready for us. Curly never did anything without doing it well, and his rooms were, I think, the most luxuriously got up in all Granta, with his grand piano, his bronzes, and his landscapes, mixed up so queerly with tobacco-pots, boxing-gloves, pipes, and portraits of ballet-pets and heroes of the Turf, yet an essentially charming and comfortable and inviting tout ensemble, much more so than if it had had the dusters of a score of housemaids, or the keen eyes of a hundred "managing women" to put it "to rights." The

luncheon was as merry as it was elaborate in comestibles—what college meal, with wild dashing Cantabs, and fast, pretty women at the board, ever was not?—and while the Badminton and champagne-cup went round, and the gyps waited as solemnly and dreadfully as gyps ever do on like occasions, a cross-fire of wit and fun and nonsense shot across the table and mingled with the perfume of Curly's hot-house bouquets enough to bring the stones of time-honored Trinity about our irreverent heads. De Vigne, in very high spirits that day, laughed and talked with all the brilliance for which society had distinguished him; Flora and Lady Blanche were always full of mischievous repartee; Curly and Julia St. Croix flirted so desperately, that if it had not been for the publicity of the scene, I believe the boy would have gone straight away into a proposal. Lady Fantyre, especially, when the claret cup had gone round freely, was so utterly amusing that we forgot she was old, and the Trefusis, if she did not contribute equally to the conversation, sat beside De Vigne, darting glances at him from her large black eyes, and looking handsome enough to be inspiration to anybody.

"So you leave to-morrow?" she said, as they were waiting for the St. Croix carriage to take them home again.

"Yes. If *you* were going to remain I should stay too; but Mrs. St. Croix tells me you leave on Monday," said De Vigne, in a low tone, with an admiring glance, to which few women would have been insensible.

She looked at him with that cold, malicious smile, which, had I been he, would have made me very careful of that woman.

"It is easy to say that when, as I *am* going on Monday, I cannot put you to the test."

De Vigne's eyes flashed; he threw back his head coldly and haughtily.

"I never trouble myself to say what I do not mean, Miss Trefusis."

She smiled again; she had found she had power to pique him.

"Then will you come and see me in town after Christmas?"

What he answered I know not, but I dare say it was in the affirmative; he would hardly have refused anything to such a glance as she gave him. He lingered beside their carriage, and looked with ardent admiration at her as he pressed her lavender-gloved hand in farewell, and stood in the Trinity gateway with a smile on his lips, watching her roll away, twisting in his fingers a white azalea she had given him; but, two hours after, the flower was thrown into the college grate, and the bedmaker swept it out with the cinders. So he was not very far gone as yet.

II.

THE MAJOR OF THE DASHERS.

THE next morning, after we had "done chapel," De Vigne, who had sent on his groom, hunters, and luggage the day before, walked down to the station, and we with him.

"I wish you two fellows were coming down to Vigne with me," he said, as we went along. "You don't know what a bore it is having a place like that! so much is expected of one. You belong to the county, and the county makes you feel the relationship pretty keenly, too. You must fill the house at Easter, September, and Christmas. You must hear horrible long speeches from your tenantry,

wishing you all sorts of health and happiness, while you're wishing them at the devil for bothering you so. You must have confounded long interviews with your steward, who looks frightfully glum at the pot of money that has been dropped over the Goodwood, and hints at the advisability of cutting down the very clump of oaks that makes the beauty of the drawing-room view. Then, worst of all, you're expected to hunt your own county, even though it be as unfit as the Wash or the Black Forest, while you're burning to be with the Burton or Tedworth, following Tom Smith, or Tom Edge, or Pytchley men, who don't funk at every bullfinch."

"Do you hunt the Vigne pack, then, always?" asked Curly.

"I? No. I never said I *did* all those things. I only said they are expected of me, and it's tiresome to say no."

"As we experience when women make love to us."

"I never can say 'no' there," laughed De Vigne. "I am so amiable, I always oblige them. Do you know, I sometimes have a fancy to try and turn the part about Vigne into a hunting country, as Assheton Smith turned Hampshire. I should have no end of opposition—men who'd vow, as his governor did to him, that if I rode over their lands they'd have me up for trespass; but that would be rather fun. It's pleasant to do things one's told not to do."

"I wonder, then," said I, "you care to make love to The Trefusis, for her eyes say, 'Do do it,' as clearly as eyes can speak."

He laughed. "Yes. I must admit she doesn't look a very impregnable citadel."

"Not if you make it worth her while to surrender."

"None of them surrender for nothing," said De Vigne,

smiling. "Chacune a son prix—with some it's cashmeres, with others yellow-boys, with some it's position, with others a wedding-ring. I can't see much difference myself, though I'd give cashmeres in plenty, and should be remarkably sorry to be chiseled into settlements."

"I should fancy so," said Curly; "only think of the annihilation of larks, liberty, fun, claret, latch-keys, oyster suppers, guinguettes, and Cafés Régence, expressed in those two doomed words, a 'married man!' The forçat's mark isn't more distinctive and more terrible. To my mind, marrying's as bad as hanging, and equally puts a finish to all life, properly so called, or worth supporting."

"Did you tell Julia your views, Curly?" asked De Vigne, quietly.

"Pooh! stuff! What's Julia to do with me? the girl at the Cherryhinton public is a vast lot better-looking," muttered Curly, with an embarrassment that made me doubt if the limes of Trinity had not heard different opinions enunciated with regard to the holy bond.—N. B. Julia St. Croix that day three months tied herself to that same snuffy, portly, wine-embalmed Fellow she had laughed at with us in King's Chapel. To be sure he had then become rector of Snooze-cum-Rest; and when Ruth goes to woo Boaz, we may always be pretty certain she knows he is master of the harvest, and has the golden wheat-ears in her eye, sweet innocent little dear though she looks.

"The Cherryhinton public! I see—that's why skittles and beer have become suddenly delightful," laughed De Vigne.

"Why not?" asked Curly, meekly. "Skittles are no sin, and malt and hops are man's natural aliment; and as for barmaids! why, if one's denied houris and nectar, one must take to Jane and bitter beer, n'est-ce pas?"

"Don't know," said De Vigne. "I prefer le Quartier

Bréda and champagne. As Balzac says, 'Une femme belle comme Galatée ou Hélène ne pourrait me plaire tant soit peu qu'elle soit crottée.'"

"You forgot that once—you didn't repudiate Lucy Davis?"

"Lucy was half a lady, in dress at least," laughed De Vigne, "and she got up uncommonly well, too; however, that was in my schoolboyish days, and one doesn't count them. After vulguses and problems a kitchenmaid is pardonable; and as for the young woman who presides over the post-office, or the oyster patties, she is perfectly irresistible. The *laissez aller* of the Paphian Temple is so delightful after the stiff stoicism of the Porch!"

"Well, thank Heaven, the Paphian Temple is built everywhere," said Curly, "and you find it under the taps of A. K., X. K., and XXX., as well as in the gilt walls of a Mayfair boudoir; else the poor devils who haven't the Mayfair key would get locked into very outer darkness indeed. Here's the train just starting. By Jove, that's lucky! All right, old fellow. Here's Puck; tumble in, old boy."

Tumbling in the old boy, (a wiry, hideous terrier, whom it was considered really beautiful to see chevying about in a barnful of rats,) De Vigne seated himself, and was rolled off en route to Vigne with a pretty brunette opposite him, who seemed imbued with extreme admiration of Puck, or—his master. Girls always begin by calling his children "little loves" to a widower, though the brats be as ugly as sin, and by admiring his dog to a bachelor, though afraid of their lives it should snap at them.

Curly and I walked back to Granta, and went to console ourselves, first with billiards and beer at Brown's, then with some hard practice on the river. I was in training with the Trinity Eight, and at that period confined all my hopes

to winning pewter, and all my aspirations to bumping John's and Corpus. Talk of the doctrine of renunciation! Preach it to a fellow who's been going in for raw steaks, few wines, no delicacies, and as small an amount of Buttery beer and Cambridge wine as possible, (no great loss that last item, *entre nous*,) and ask *him* if he'd find it either "sweet" or "easy" to choose being bumped, instead of bumping! Pooh! you might as well tell him to pray I might cut a crab out of sheer kindness to Christ's or Katherine Hall!"

Never do I get on boating, or look at the old pewter I won when we covered John's with mortification unspeakable in the run for the Ely Long Challenge Cup, but what Cambridge comes back to me in the full swing of all its jolly days, and I feel my back bend, my muscle swell, and my heart pump like a hammer of twenty-horse power, as I used to pull up the Cam in my outrigger or the eight-oar. I belong to the Blue Jersey B. C., the first in England; but somehow I don't feel the zest now that I used to feel cutting through the water with strong six-foot Monckton as stroke, (poor fellow! he went down with jungle fever, and is lying in the banyan shadow, in Ceylon sand,) and that merry, wicked little dog, Phil Hervey, for coxswain; he's a bishop now, and hush-hushes you, and strokes his apron, if you whisper the smallest crumb of fun over his capital comet wine. Dear old Cambridge! I wouldn't give a straw for a Cambridge man who didn't grow prolix as he talked of her, and didn't empty a bumper of Guinness's or Moët—as his taste may lie—in her honor. You may try to run up King's College, Glasgow, St. Bees, and all those places, sir, if you choose. They cram well there, possibly—I don't gainsay it—but where is the gentleman-like ring, the hearty good-fellowship, the polishing for your rough diamond, the leveling for your conceited cox-

comb, the perfecting in all muscular and athletic power, to be found in the twin universities? A man may read, or he may not read, at college. I prefer the boy who knows how to feather his scull, to him who only knows Latin quantities and Greek unities; at any rate, he will find his level, measure his weight, and learn—unless he be obtuse indeed—that through college life, as through all other life, the best watchwords are—Pluck and Honor.

I learnt that much at least, and it is no mean lesson, though I must admit that, after having had my cross taken away, been gated times innumerable, having done all the books of Virgil by way of penance, (paying little Crip, my wine-merchant's son, to write them out for me,) and been shown up before the proctor on no less than six separate occasions, I got rusticated in my fourth term, and finally took my name off the books. The governor laughed, preferred my Grind Cups, and my share in winning the Challenge Cup, to any Bell's or Craven's scholarships, and paid my debts without a murmur. Too good to be true, you will say, *ami lecteur*? No; there *are* fathers who can remember they have been young, though they are unspeakably rare—as rare as ladies who can let you forget it!

Now came the question, what should I do? “Nothing,” the correct thing, according to the governor. “Stand for the county,” my mother suggested. “Go as attaché to my cousin, the envoy to St. Petersburg,” my relatives opined, who had triumphed, with much unholy glory, over my rustication, as is the custom of relatives from time immemorial. As it chanced, I had no fancy for either utter dolce, the bray of St. Stephen's or the snows of Russia, so I put down my name for a commission. We had plenty of interest to push it, and the *Gazette* soon announced, “—th P. O. Lancers, Arthur Vane Tierney Chevasney, to be Cornet, *vice* James Yelverton, promoted;” and the —th,

always known in the service as the Dashers, was De Vigne's troop, my old Frestonhills hero !

The Dashers were then quartered at Kensington and Hounslow, and the first thing I saw as I drove through Knightsbridge was De Vigne's groom, Harris, riding a powerful thorough-bred, swathed in body-clothing, whom I recognized as Berwick, famous in the Euston Hollows run. You may be very sure that as soon as my interviews with the Adjutant and the Colonel were over, I found out De Vigne's rooms as speedily as possible. He had the drawing-room floor of a house in Kensington Gore, large, lofty rooms, with folding-doors, well-furnished, and further embellished with crowds of things of his own, from Persian carpets bought in his travels, to the last new rifle sent home only the day before. I made my way up unannounced, and stood a minute or two in the open doorway. They were pleasant rooms, just as a man likes to have them, with all the things he wants about him ready to his hand ; no madame to make him miserable by putting his pipes away out of sight, and no housekeeper to drive him distracted by sorting his papers, and introducing order among his pet lumber. A setter, a retriever, and a couple of Skyes, with Puck bolt upright in the midst of them, were on the hearth-rug, (veritable tiger-skin ;) breakfast, in dainty Sevres and silver, stood on one table, sending up a delicious aroma of coffee, omelettes, and devils ; the morning papers lay on the floor, a smoking-cap was hung, unchivalrously, on a Parian Venus ; a parrot, who apparently considered himself master of the place, was perched irreverently on a bronze Milton, and pipes, whips, pistols, and cards were thrown down on a velvet couch that Louise de Kéroualle or Clara d'Ische might have graced. From the inner room there came the rapid clash of small swords. while "Touche, touche, touche ! riposte ! hola !" was

shouted, in a silvery voice, from a man who, lying back in a rocking-chair in the bay-window of the front room, was looking on at a bout with the foils that was taking place beyond the folding-doors. The two men who were fencing were De Vigne and a smaller, slighter fellow, the one calm, cool, steady, and never at a disadvantage, the other, skillful indeed, but too hot, eager, and rapid. In fencing, whether with the foils or the tongue, the grand secret is to be cool, for in proportion to your tranquillity grows your opponent's exasperation. The man in the bay-window was too deeply interested to observe me, so I waited patiently till De Vigne had sent the other man's foil flying from his hand, and then I went forward to claim his attention. He turned, with one of his sweet, rare, sunny smiles: "Ah! dear old fellow, how are you? Charmed to see you. This is the best move you ever made, Arthur. Mr. Chevasney, Colonel Sabretasche, M. de Cheffontaine, a trio of my best friends. We only want Curly to make the *partie carrée* perfect. Sit down, old boy; we have just breakfasted, I am sorry to say, but here are the things, and all the sardines, and you shall soon have some hot chocolate and *côtelettes*."

While he talked he forced me into an arm-chair, and disregarding all my protests that I had already breakfasted twice—once at Longholme and once at a station—rang for his man. De Cheffontaine flung himself on a sofa, and began with a *mot* on his own defeat; the man in the bay-window got lazily out of his rocking-chair and strolled over to us; De Vigne took his *meerschaum*, and we were soon talking away as hard as we could go of the *belles* of that season, the *pets* of the ballet, Richmond, the Spring Meetings, the best sales in the yard, the last matches at Lord's, the chances of Heliotrope's being scratched for the

Goodwood, the certainty that Vane Stevens's roan filly would lose the trotting-match, with other like topics, to us, at least, of absorbing interest and importance. Sabretasche was, I found, a Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel and Major of the Dashers, and a most agreeable man he seemed, lying back in his chair, making us laugh heartily at witticisms which he spoke, quietly and indolently, in a soft, low, mellow voice. Had I been a woman, that beautiful face would have done for me irretrievably, as, according to report, it had done for a good many. Beautiful it was, even to my eye; and men value the size of another's muscle and the strength of his sinew more than they do the form of his face. But beautiful it was, with its pallid, aristocratic features, large, dark, mournful eyes, silky moustache, and wavy hair. Reckless devil-may-care, the man looked the recklessness of one who heeds nothing in heaven or earth—a little hardened by the world and its rubs, rendered cynical, perhaps, by injustice and wrong—but in the eyes there lay a kindness, and in the mouth a sadness which betokened better things. He might have been thirty, five-and-thirty, forty. One could no more tell his age than his character, though, looking at him, one could fancy it true what the world said of him—that no man ever found so faithful a friend, and no woman a more faithless lover than Vivian Sabretasche.

“Chevasney, who do you think is one of the *beautés régnautes* up here?” asked De Vigne, pushing me some Cubas.

“How should I know? The Cherryhinton barmaid?”

“Don't be a fool.”

“The Trefusis, then?”

“Of course. She is still living with that abominable old Irishwoman, Lady Fantyre. They're in Bruton Street—a pleasant house, only everybody wonders where the

peeress finds the money. They give uncommonly agreeable receptions. Don't they, Sabretasche?"

"Oh, very!" answered the Colonel, with an enigmatical smile, "especially to you, I've no doubt; and the only tax levied on one for the entertainment is to pay a few compliments to mademoiselle, and a few guinea points to my lady. I can't say all the guests are the best ton; there are too many ladies designated by the definite article, and too many gentlemen with cordons in their button-holes; but they know how to amuse one another, and the women, if not exclusive, are at least remarkably pretty. The Trefusis is more than pretty, especially smoking a cigarette! Shall you allow her cigars when you're married to her, De Vigne?"

"Not *when* I am."

"There's an unjust fellow! How like a man that is!" cried Sabretasche. "What's charming in any other women becomes horrid in his wife. You remind me of Jessie Villars: when her husband smokes, she vows the scent will kill her; when Wyndham meets her on the terrace, taking his good-night pipe, she lisps there's nothing so delightful as the scent of Cavendish. Come, Mr. Chevasney, I don't mind prying into my friends' affairs before their faces. Have not De Vigne and the Trefusis had some nice little flirtation before now?"

"To be sure," I answered. "It began to be rather a desperate affair; the Trinity backs could tell you many a tale, I dare say. He came down for Diana, and forsook her for Venus."

"But you can't say, old fellow, I ever deserted the quiver for the ceinture," cried De Vigne. "The Viewaway was never eclipsed by the Trefusis!"

"I don't know that. Have you taken up the affair where you left it?"

"I never reveal secrets that ladies share," said De Vigne, with a comically demure air, "but I'll be very generous, Arthur. I'll take you to call on her."

"Bien obligé. What do you think of this beauty, M. de Cheffontaine?" I asked of the lively little Baron.

"Oh!" laughed he, "je trouve toutes vos Anglaises superbes, magnifiques—quand elles ne sont pas prudes."

"Et cela est un défaut que vous ne pouvez pardonner, hé, mon cher?" asked Sabretasche, with his low silvery laugh.

"Ni vous non plus; mais la pruderie est une faute dont on ne peut jamais accuser la Trefusis."

Sabretasche laughed again, and quoted

"Non, jamais tourterelle
N'aima plus tendrement.
Comme elle était fidèle
A—son dernier amant!"

De Vigne did not appear best pleased; he lifted his head to look out of the window into the park, and as he looked his annoyance seemed to increase. I followed his glance, and saw the Trefusis on a very showy bay, of not first-rate action, taking her morning canter.

"Ah, talk of an angel, you know!—there she is," said Sabretasche. "Wise woman to show often en amazone; it suits her better than anything. She has met little Jimmy Levison, and taken him on with her. Poor Jimmy! between her smiles and old Fantyre's honors he won't come off the better for those Bruton Street soirées. Why, De Vigne, you look quite wrathful. You wouldn't be jealous of little Jimmy, would you?"

I don't suppose De Vigne was jealous of little Jimmy, but I dare say he was not flattered to see the same wiles given to trap that very young pigeon that were bestowed to lure a fiery hawk like himself.

"It amuses me to see all those women taking their morning rides and walks," Sabretasche continued. "They love their darling horses so! and they do so delight in the morning air, and the green trees look so pleasant after the dusty pavé! and they never hint that they know the Knightsbridge men will be looking out for them, and that Charlie will be accidentally lounging by the rails, and Johnnie be found reading the *Morning Post* under the large avenue. The Trefusis will tell us that she cannot exist without her morning trot on 'dear Diamond,' but, sans doute, she remembered that De Vigne would be pretty sure to be breakfasting by this window, not to mention that she had whispered to little Jimmy her wish to see his new gray hack. I always look *under* women's words as I look under their veils; they mean them to embellish, but I don't choose they should hide at the same time."

"How do you act, Colonel," laughed De Vigne, "when you come to a Shetland veil tied down very tight?"

"I never yet met one that hadn't some holes," said Sabretasche. "No women are long a puzzle, they are too inconsistent, and betray their artifices by overdoing them. She is out of sight now, De Vigne. Would you like your horse ordered?"

De Vigne laughed.

"Thank you, no. Do you go to the new opera to-night, Sabretasche?"

"Yes. You know I never miss, though I should go with infinitely more pleasure if I could get the glories of Gluck and Mozart instead of the sing-song ballads of Verdi and Balfe."

"Music is the god of his idolatry," said De Vigne, turning to me. "It is positively one of his passions. Your heaven will be composed of sweet sounds, eh, Sabretasche?"

"As yours of houris and of thorough-breds."

"Perhaps. I should combine Mahomet's and the Indian's ideas into one—almond eyes and a good hunting-ground!" laughed Granville. "Look here, Arthur, at this Challenge. That man yonder did it. Isn't he a clever fellow—too good to lie still in a rocking-chair and talk about women?"

I looked at the Challenge, a little marble statuette from Landseer's picture, product of the Colonel's chisel. It was a wonderful little thing; every minutia, even each fine point of the delicate antlers, most beautifully and perfectly finished.

"How immensely jolly!" said I, involuntarily expressing my honest admiration—"how intensely delightful, to possess such a talent! What a resource it must be—what a refuge when other things pall!"

He smiled at my enthusiasm, and raised his eyebrows.

"Cui bono?" he said, softly, as he rose and pushed back his chair.

The man interested me, and when he and the Baron were gone I asked De Vigne what he knew of him, as we stood waiting for his tilbury, to go and call in Bruton Street.

"Of Vivian Sabretasche? I know much of him socially, little of himself; and of his history—if history he have—nothing. He is excessively kind to me, honorable and generous in all his dealings, a gentleman always. More of him I know not, nor, were we acquainted ten years, should I at the end, I dare say, know more."

"Why?"

"Why? For this reason, that nobody does. Hollingsworth and he were cornets together, yet Hollingsworth is as much a stranger to the real man as you or I. There are some men, you know, who don't wear their hearts on their sleeves; he is one, I am another. We are like snow

balls; to begin with, it's a piece of snow, soft and pure and malleable, and easily enough melted; but the snowball gets kicked about and mixed up with other snow, and knocked against stones and angles, and hurried and shoved and pushed along till, in sheer self-defense, it hardens itself into a solid, impenetrable, immovable block of ice."

"Nonsense! You are not that yet."

"Not yet."

I should say he was not. The passionate blood of five-and-twenty was more likely to be at boiling point than at zero.

PART THE THIRD.

I.

HOW A SUBTLE POISON IS DRANK IN THE CHAMPAGNE AT AN OPERA SUPPER.

VERY good style was the Bruton Street house, and very good style (not *my* style, but that did not matter) was the Trefusis, sitting on a rose-hued couch, with the rose light of curtains of the same tint falling on her from the window, where she was surrounded by plants and birds in cages and on stands, with a young blonde-moustached boy out of the Guards, and a courtly white-haired old French exile lounging away their morning there. She was dressed in the extreme of fashion—almost too well, if ladies will admit such a thing to be possible—and she always reminded me of some first-rate actresses at the Français or the Bouffes playing the rôles of high-bred women, looking and speaking like ladies of the best society, and yet whom, 'o what one will, and be they as graceful as they may, one

cannot divest of a certain aroma, due rather, perhaps, to the proximity of the proscenium and foot-lights than to any fault of breeding in themselves; yet a something which we know we should not discover in the true marquises and baronnes of the Faubourg.

She looked up with a smile of conscious power, gave her hand tenderly to De Vigne with a full sweep of her superb eyes under their thick fringes, bent her head courteously to me, and put her Pomeranian dog on his knee. Old Lady Fantyre was there, playing propriety, if propriety could ever be persuaded to let herself be represented by that hook-nosed, disreputable, detestable, amusing old woman, who sat working away at the tapestry-frame with her gold spectacles on, occasionally lifting up her little keen brown eyes and mingling in the conversation, telling the old tales of "ma jeunesse," of the Bath and the Wells, of Ombre and Quadrille with Sheridan and Selwyn, of Talleyrand and Burke, "old Q." and Lady Coventry.

"I remember you at Cambridge, Mr. Chevasney, and our merry luncheon," said the Trefusis, as if Cambridge belonged to some dim era of her childhood, which it was astonishing she could recall at all.

"What! my dear," burst in Lady Fantyre, "you don't mean to say you remember all your acquaintances, do you? If so, ye'll have enough to do."

"Certainly not. But when they are as agreeable as Mr. Chevasney——"

"Of course—of course—ça va sans dire. Les présens ont toujours raison," continued the Viscountess, in her lively treble; "as true, by the way, that is, as its twin maxim, Les absens ont toujours tort. It would be hard, indeed, if we might not tell tales of our friends when they couldn't hear us. But I know *we* used to give cuts by the dozen. I remember walking down the Birdcage Walk with

Selwyn, (poor dear Selwyn, there isn't his like in this day; I remember him so well, though I was but a little chit then!) and a man, a very personable man, too—but, Lord! my dear, not one of us—came up, and reminded George he had known him in Bath. What do you think Selwyn did, my dear? Why, stared him in the face, of course, and said, 'Well, sir, in Bath I may possibly know you again.'"

"That beats Brummel, when a lady apologized for keeping him so long standing by her carriage: 'My dear lady, there is no one to see it,'" said De Vigne, laughing.

"Abominable!" cried the Trefusis. "If I had been that woman I would have told him I had made sure of that, or I would not have hazarded my reputation by being seen with him."

"Brummel would have been very willing to have been seen with *you*," said De Vigne, fixing his eyes on her, and he knows pretty well how to make his eyes talk, I assure you.

"There's not one of you men now-a-days like Selwyn," began the old raconteuse again, while the Trefusis bent her stately head to her blond Guardsman, and De Vigne balanced his cane thoughtfully on the Pomeranian's nose. "You talk of your great wit Lord John Bonmot; why, he hasn't as much wit in his whole body as there was in poor dear George's little finger. Lord! how we laughed when Charles Fox asked him if he'd been to see the execution of a criminal, you know, called by the same name, Charles Fox, who was hanged. 'Not I,' said George. 'I make a point of never attending rehearsals.' Ah! there isn't one-half the wit, the verve, the talent among you new people there were in my young time. Where is the man among you that can make laughter run down the table as my friend Sheridan could? Which of you can move heads and hearts

like William Pitt? Where among those idle lads in the Temple, who smoke Cavendish and drink beer till they *think* nothing better than tobacco and beer, shall I see another Tom Erskine? Poor dear Tom! who was such a naughty boy till that girl took him in hand. Which among those brainless scribblers who print poems, and make one want a Tennyson's Dictionary only to understand the foolish adjectives in them, can write like that boy Byron, with his handsome face and his wry foot? Lord, what a fuss there was with him when he was first made a lion! And then to turn his coffin from the Abbey! Such comic verses as he made on my parrot, too, he and young Hobhouse!"

And old Fantyre, having fairly talked herself out of breath, at last halted, and De Vigne, annoyed first of all with little Jimmy in the morning, and secondly with the attention the Trefusis gave her blondin, neglected her for the Viscountess, with much parade.

"I fear you are right, madam," he said, laughing. "Ours is an age of general action rather than individual greatness. We have a good catalogue of ships, but no Ulysses, no Atrides, no Agamemnon——"

"I don't remember them: they wern't in our set," responded Lady Fantyre, naively.

"Or perhaps," continued De Vigne, stroking his moustache with laudable gravity, "it is rather that intellectual light is diffused so much more widely that the particular owners of it are not so much noticed. Arago may be as great a man as Galileo, but it is natural that a world that teaches the laws of gravitation in its twopenny schools scarcely regards him with the same wonder as if they disbelieved in their earth's movement, and were ready to burn him for his audacity."

"Ours is an age of science and of money," said the old exile. "It is an age of machinery, tubular bridges, rail-

roads, telegraphs, whose principal aim is to economize labor and time; an age in which everything is turned to full account, from dead algæ to living brains; and what will not yield some grain for its own good, or the good of the community, is thrown aside as chaff, and cannot complain, for it is a universal law."

"Yes," said De Vigne, "we are eminently practical; we extract the veratrin from crocuses, and value Brunel more than Bulwer. We throw our millions into a scheme for cutting through an isthmus, but we cannot spare our minutes to listen to the music of the spheres, though Pythagoras were resuscitated to teach us them. So best! many more of us find it of much greater importance to get quickly to India than to wait for all the learning of the schools; and Adam Smith, though infinitely more prosaic, is probably a much more useful philosopher than Bolingbroke."

"Captain De Vigne, why don't you stand for the county?" asked the Trefusis, playing with her breloques, and looking truly magnificent in her rose-velvet setting.

"Because I'm before my time," laughed De Vigne. "If I could have a select cabinet of esprits forts I should be delighted to join them, and help them to seminate liberty and tolerance; but really to settle Maynooth grants, to quarrel on rags or no rags, to settle whether we shall confine ourselves to 'corks squared for rounding' or admit rounded corks into the country, to hear one noble lord blackguard his noble friend opposite, and one hon. member split hairs with another hon. member—it would be beyond me, it would indeed. I would as soon go every night to an old ladies' tea-fight, where bonnets were rancorously discussed and characters mercilessly blackened over Sou-chong and muffins."

"Come!" said the Trefusis, "you find such fault with your generation you should set to work and regenerate it

Hunting with the Viewaway, and lounging about drawing-rooms, will not do much toward improving your species."

"Why should I? As Sabretasche says, 'Cui bono?'" answered De Vigne, annoyed at her sarcastic and nonchalant tone.

"Then you have certainly no business to sit at home at ease and laugh at other men over your claret and Cubas. Why may not other geniuses have equal right to that easy put off of yours, 'Cui bono?'"

"They have not equal right if they have once assumed to be geniuses. Let a man assert himself to be something, be it a great man or a scoundrel, and the world expects him to prove his assertion. But an innocent officer, who likes his claret and Cubas, troubles nobody, and never sets up for a mute inglorious Milton, declining to sing only because his audience isn't good enough for him, has a right to be left to his claret and Cubas, and not to be worried because it happens he is not what he never pretended to be."

The Trefusis looked at him maliciously; there was the devil in that woman's eye.

"And are you content to be lost in the bouquet of the wine, and buried in the smoke of the tobacco? Are you satisfied with spending your noble existence in an allegorical chaise-longue, picking out the motes and never remembering the beam?"

The tone was provoking in the extreme; it put up De Vigne's blood, as the first touch of the snaffle does a young thorough-bred. He smiled, and stroked his long, silky moustaches.

"That depends upon circumstances. When I have had my full swing of deviltries, extravagances, dissipations, pleasures, Trefusises, and other charming flowers that beset the path of youth, I may, perhaps, turn to something."

It was an abominably rude speech; and though De Vigne spoke in the soft, courteous tone he used to all women, whether peeress or peasant, eighty or eighteen, it had its full effect on the Trefusis. She flushed crimson, then turned pale, and I shouldn't have cared to provoke the malignant glance those superb eyes shot upon him. She took no notice, and, turning to the little Guardsman, thanked him for a bouquet he had sent to her, and pointed it out to him, set in a console near.

De Vigne drove the tilbury from the door supremely gloomy and silent.

"I say, Arthur," he said at last, "Victor Hugo says, somewhere, that we are women's playthings, and women are the devil's. I fancy Satan will get the worse of the bargain, don't you?"

"The deuce I do—that's to say, if the war's in words; though I must say you polished off the Trefusis neatly enough just now. Did you see the look she gave you?"

"Yes," said De Vigne, shortly. "However, anything's better than a milk-and-water woman. I should grow sick of a girl who always agreed with me. They look so pretty when their blood's up. Where shall we go now? Suppose we turn into the Yard, and take a look at those steel grays Sabretasche mentioned? I want a new pair to run tandem. And then we can take a turn or two round the Ring, and I'll show you the women worth cultivating, young one."

We followed out his programme, bargained for the grays at a hundred and fifty—and immensely cheap, too, for they were three-parts thorough-bred, with beautiful action—drove half a dozen times round the Ring, where fifty pair of bright eyes gleamed softly on De Vigne, from the Marchioness of Turquoises in her stately barouche, to little Coralie of Her Majesty's ballet in her single horse brougham;

and then went to mess, where I made acquaintance with the rest of the fellows in the Dashers—capital fellows they were, too, and enjoyed good salmi and first-rate champagne; the Dashers being as crack a troop as the Tenth, Eleventh, or the Blues, with a peculiar pattern for their plate, a chef for their cook, and a good claret connoisseur in their Colonel. The claret was a vast lot better than Cambridge port, the dinner was something rather superior to hall, and the mess was a good deal greater fun than Moncton's Joe Miller jokes, and Phil Hervey's Simon the Cellarer, at our very best wines. I liked *this* soupçon of vie militaire, at any rate, and, upon my word, I quite regretted leaving the table when Sabretasche invited me to go with him to his box at the Opera, for I didn't care two pins for music, but I did not dare to refuse the first favor from such an exclusive man, and, besides, I had seen little Coralie in the Ring, and consoled myself with the thought of the ballet. De Vigne was going too, for reasons best known to himself, and went to his stall, while I followed the Colonel to his box, in the middle of the second act.

Sabretasche spoke not at all while Grisi was on the stage, and I put my lorgnon up and took a glance round the house. I always think Her Majesty's, on a grand night, with all the boxes filled with the handsomest and best-dressed women in town, one of the prettiest sights going; and I did the grand tier deliberately, going from loge to loge, so that it was some little time before I got on the second tier; and in one of its center boxes, looking like a very exquisite gipsy queen, in a scarlet opera cloak, with scarlet and gold in her raven hair, and scarlet camellias against her white lace dress, sat the Trefusis, with little bright-eyed, hooked-nosed, bewigged, and black Mechlin'd old Fantyre as a foil.

Presently the Trefusis raised her bouquet to her lips

quite carelessly, to take its perfume, I presume. I happened to look down at De Vigne: his lorgnon was fixed on her too. He smiled, left his stall, and in a minute or two I saw him displacing the blond Guardsman, and bending down to the Trefusis.

"What do you think of that affair, Chevasney?" said the Colonel to me, as the curtain came down.

"I don't know enough how it stands to judge. Enlighten me, will you?"

Sabretasche shook his head.

"I know no more than yourself. De Vigne, like all wise men, is silent upon his own business, and I never attempt to pry into it. I see the thing on its surface, and it seems to me that the lady is serious, whatever he be."

"Serious? Oh, hang it! he can't be serious."

"Tant pis pour lui if he be," said the Colonel, smiling. 'But, my dear boy, you do not know women as yet; how should you, in two-and-twenty years, read that enigmatical book, which is harder to guess at than Sanscrit or black letter? And you can never fathom the deep game that a clever one like the Trefusis, if I mistake her not, can play when she chooses."

I, the most knowing hand in Granta—I, who if I did pique myself on any one thing, piqued myself on my skill and knowledge in managing the beau sexe—I, to be told I did not know women! I pocketed the affront as best I might, for I felt a growing respect and liking for the Colonel, with his myriad talents, his brilliant reputation, and mysterious reserve, and told him I did not believe De Vigne cared an atom more for the Trefusis than for twenty others before her.

"I hope so," he answered; "but that chess they are playing yonder ends too often in checkmate. However, we will not prophesy so bad a fate for our friend, for worse he

could not have than to fall into those soft-gloved hands. By the way, though, her hands are not soft, they are not the hands of a lady."

"You have a bad opinion of the Trefusis, Colonel?"

"Not of the Trefusis in particular."

"Of her sex, then?"

"I have cause," he answered, briefly. "How full the house is, and how few of those people come for music. How few of them would care if it were dance music of D'Albert's, instead of Donizetti's symphonies, if the dance music chanced to be most in fashion. Make it the rage, and three-quarters of the music lovers here would run after a barrel-organ ground on that stage, as they are now doing after Mario. Half England, if the Court, the Peerage, and Belgravia voted the sun a bore, and a rushlight *comme il faut*, would instantly shut their shutters and burn rushlights while the fashion lasted. And then people care for the world's opinion!"

"Because they can't get on without it."

"True enough; they despise it, but they must bow to it before they can use it and turn it to their own ends—those must, at least, who live by sufferance on it and through it. Thank God, I want nothing from it, and can defy it at my leisure—or rather forget it and neglect it, defying is too much trouble. A man who *defies* is certain to raise a hue and cry to dog his heels, whose bray and clamor is as senseless as it is deafening, and no more able to declare what *bête noire* it has come out after than Dogberry. Ah, you are studying that fair girl in the fifth from the center. That is little Eulalie Papillon. Does she not look a pretty, innocent dove? Yet she will cost those three fellows with her more than a racing stud, and she is as avaricious as Harpagon. I should like to make a computation of how many of these people come for music. That old man there,

who droops his head and takes snuff during the entr'actes; those fellows on the ground tier taking shorthand notes for the daily journals; one or two dilettante ladies who really know something of fugues and symphonies, those are all, I verily believe. Little Eulalie comes to show herself, and carry Bevan off to her petit souper, for fear any fairer Laïs should pounce on him; those décolletées and diamondized old ladies come because it is one of the Yards where their young fillies tell best, and may chance to get a bid. Lady Ormolu there, that one with marabouts in her hair, comes because her lord is a George Dandin, and she has no chance of meeting Villiers, who is her present Cléante, anywhere else. Mrs. Lacquers, the owner of those very white teeth yonder—truly Howard's one of the greatest benefactors to the beau sexe going—is here because there was a rumor that her husband's bank would not stand, and he, who is a Bible society president and vessel of grace, but who still keeps one eye open on terrestrial affairs, has told her to exhibit here to-night, and be as lively as possible, with plenty of rubies about her, so that he may get off to Boulogne. Dear man! he remembers 'Aide-toi et Dieu t'aidera.'

"Have you a private Belpégor in your pocket, sir?" said I, dropping my lorgnon, "to help you unroof the houses and unlock your acquaintances' brains?"

"My Belpégor is experience," laughed Sabretasche. "And now hush, if you please, Chevasney; there is Grisi again, and as I come for music, though nobody else may, I like to be quiet."

It was curious to note the change that came over his melancholy, raffiné, and expressive countenance, as, leaning forward, he listened to the priestess, and I saw the gaze of many women fixed upon him, as, with his eyes half closed, and his thoughts far away, he leaned against the side of his

box. They said he was deucedly dangerous to women, and one could hardly wonder if he was. A gallant soldier in the field, a charming companion in a club or mess-room, accomplished in music, painting, sculpture, as in the hardier arts of rifle and rod, speaking eight continental languages with equal facility, his manners exquisitely tender and gentle, his voice soft as the Italian he best loved to speak, his face and form of unusual beauty, and to back him, all that subtler art that is only acquired in the eleusinia of the boudoir,—no marvel if women, his pet playthings, did go down before Vivian Sabretasche. He came of a family as poor as they were proud, and was born in Italy, where his father, having spent what money he had at the green tables, lived to retrench—retrenchment being always synonymous, in English minds, with the Continent, though whether a palace, even if a little tumble-down, ortolans, lachrymachristi, and nightly reunions, do tend to tighten purse-strings and benefit check-books, is an open question. Luckily for Sabretasche, his uncle, a rich old roué of the Alvanley and Pierrepont time, went off the stage without an heir, and he, at three-and-twenty, came in for all the property, a princely balance at Barclay's, a delicious town-house, and a moor up in Inverness-shire. On his accession, he left the Neapolitan Hussars, entered the Queen's, and took the position to which his old name and new wealth entitled him. It was always the popular idea that Sabretasche had some history or other, though *why* he should have nobody could probably have told you; but everybody loved him, from the charger that followed him like a dog, and ate out of his hand, to the young Cornets who, in their larks and their difficulties, always found a lenient judge and a kind friend in gay, wealthy, liberal, highly-gifted, and ultra-fashionable Vivian Sabretasche.

When he had drunk his fill of music, and I had clapped

little Coralie to my heart's content—an ovation that young lady little needed, having a claque of her own in omnibus-boxes, not to mention some twenty men who threw her rare bouquets with veritable bracelets and bravissime—Sabretasche and I passing through the crush-room, or rather the draughty, catarrh-conferring passages that answer to that portion of Her Majesty's now-a-days, came close to De Vigne with the Trefusis on his arm, bending his haughty head till his moustaches touched her gold and scarlet wreath, while the little blondin escorted Lady Fantyre, nowise enraptured, apparently, at the charge of that shrewd old dame, with her sandal-wood perfume and old lace of price and dirt untold. They could not get on; Lady Fantyre's carriage was not yet up, and we stood and chatted together, the Trefusis smiling very graciously on us, but reserving all her most telling glances for De Vigne, on whose arm she hung with a sort of proprietorship, for which I cursed her with most unchristian earnestness.

"Come home to supper with us," whispered the Trefusis, as their carriage was at last announced.

De Vigne accepted the invitation with a flash of his eyes, which showed one well enough the Trefusis was beginning to play the deuce with him; and old Fantyre extended it to Sabretasche and to me. The Colonel smiled, and bowed his acquiescence, and told his man to drive us to Bruton Street, as De Vigne sprang into the Fantyre brougham.

"I was engaged to what I like much better, lansquenet at Hollingsworth's; but I want to see how the game lies in Bruton Street. I fancy that woman's moves will be worth watching," said Sabretasche, throwing himself back on his cushions. "By the way, *who* is she—do you know?"

"The devil I don't! Somebody up at Cambridge said

she was old Fantyre's companion, others whispered her daughter, others her niece, others, what the old woman said herself, that she is the child of her brother—a John, or James, or something monosyllabic, Trefusis."

"No very exalté lineage that," returned Sabretasche; "for, if report be true—and I believe it is—the Fantyre at sixteen was an orange-girl, like the first Polly Peachem, crying, 'Who'll buy 'em, two a penny!' up Pall Mall; that Fantyre, the most eccentric of eccentric Irishmen, (and all Hibernians have a touch of madness,) beheld her from his window in Arthur's, fell in love with her foot and leg, walked out, offered to her on the pavé, was accepted of course, and married her at seventy-five. What fools there are in the world, Chevasney! She pushed her way cleverly enough, though as to knowing all the exclusives she talks about, she no more knew them than my dog did. She heard of them, of course; saw some of the later ones at Ranelagh and the Wells; very likely won francs at piquet from poor Brummel when he was in decadence at Caen, to put him in mind of the palmy days when he fleeced Coombe of ponies; possibly entertained Talleyrand, when the Bishop of Autun was glad of an English asylum; and, of course, would get Moore, and Jeffreys, and Tom Erskine, and all the young fellows; for a pretty woman, and a shrewd woman, can always make men forget she sprang from the gutter: but as to the others—pooh! she was no more intimate with them than I; old Fantyre himself was in far too mauvaise odeur, and when he died at ninety-six, left his widow to live by her wits at the Bads, rather than to figure as a leader of ton. Here we are: it will all be very *comme il faut* and irréprochable—I bet you, Chevasney, Lady Fantyre is afraid of my eye-glass!"

It was all *comme il faut* and irréprochable. De Vigne was sitting beside the Trefusis with his arm thrown over

the back of her chair, his glowing, passionate eyes fixed on hers with the vehement will and feeling that was characteristic of his fiery and concentrated nature; while in the Trefusis's face was merely the look of calm, conscious beauty, gratified at triumph and exigent of homage—a beauty the embodiment of tyranny—a beauty that would exult in denying the passion it excited—a beauty only a tool in the hands of its possessor, to pioneer a path for her ambitions and draw within her reach the prizes that she coveted.

De Vigne did not look best pleased to see us. I dare say he would have preferred a tête-à-tête supper, with old Lady Fantyre dozing after her champagne. Such, however, was denied to him; perhaps they knew how to manage him better than to make his game too easy. Do any of us care for the tame pheasants knocked over at our feet in a battue, as we do for an outlying deer that has led us many hours' weary toil through burn and bracken, over rock and furze? We knock down the pheasants to swell our triumph, and leave them where they fall, to be picked up after us; but the difficulty and excitement of the other warm our blood and fire our pride, and we think no toil or trouble too great to hear the ping of the bullet and see the quarry pulled down at last.

We had a very pleasant supper. Opera suppers are always pleasant to my mind; there is a *laissez aller* about them, and that always gives a certain *pointe à la sauce*, which it would be better for ladies to put down among their items for a *soirée* a good deal oftener than they do.

There was plenty of champagne, and, under its genial influences, the Fantyre tongue was loosened, and Sabretasche amused himself with the old lady's shrewd wit and not over-particular stories—a queer contrast enough to the 'tittle snuffy, rouged, and wigged Irish Peeress, with his

delicate beauty of feature, and singular refinement of mind and of tone; while De Vigne fired, not by the wine, for he had too strong a head, and, moreover, I doubt if he took quite so much as our hostess, but by the Parthian glances that had been so freely bestowed on him, and the proximity of that superb Trefusis, his idol—at least for the present—talked with the spirit, and wit, and very soul of repartee, of which, when he chose, no man on earth could give out more brilliant corruscations. The Trefusis never said very much; hers was chiefly silent warfare.

“What did you think of the ballet, Colonel?” asked old Fantyre, peering up into his face. At seventy-six women are still much kinder to a handsome man than to a plain one.

“I thought very little of it,” answered Sabretasche. “Coralie has no grace; boys make a fuss with her because she happens to be pretty, but as for her dancing—faugh! scores of Castilian girls I have seen doing the fandango under the village chestnut-trees would beat her hollow.”

“Glorious dance that fandango is!” said De Vigne. “Those magnificent Spanish women——(by the way, Miss Trefusis, a bet was laid at the United yesterday that you were a Spaniard; Cheffontaine swore you ought to be a Provençale; and Sabretasche here said if you went to Naples they would claim you as a compatriote; see what it is to make all nations quarrel for you!) I have danced the fandango: no more able to help myself when the girl and the castanets began, than the holy cardinals, who, when they came to Madrid to excommunicate the cachucha, ended by joining in it. Like the rest of us, I suppose, they found forbidding a thing to other people very easy and pleasant, but going without it themselves rather more difficult.”

“You never go without a thing you like, do you?” asked the Trefusis.

"Certainly not. Why should I?"

"I don't know; only boys who have reveled in Bath buns sometimes rue it when they realize chromate of lead."

"Oh! as for that," laughed De Vigne, "the moralists make out that a sort of chromate of lead follows, as natural sequence, any Bath buns one may fancy to eat. I don't see it myself. I've eaten a good many buns, but they have had veritable sugar on them, and I have not been the worse; and, even if I were, I question if the boy who lingers miserably at the pastrycook's window, without the twopence that would enable him to go in and satisfy his longings, does not suffer quite as much in one way as his richer schoolfellow, who staggers home suffering under a repletion of tuck!"

"Only the worst of it is, that under repletion of tuck one loses one's relish for it," said Sabretasche.

"Does one?" laughed De Vigne, emptying his wine-glass. "Ah, well, I am not at that stage just yet."

"Your best Bath buns are women, Captain De Vigne," said Lady Fantyre, with her silent chuckle, "and you'll be uncommonly lucky, my dear, if you don't find some chromate of lead, as you call it, after one or two of *them*."

"He will, indeed," smiled Sabretasche. "Ladies are the exact antipodes of olives: the one begins in salt, and leaves us blessed with a delicious rose aroma; the other, with all due deference, is nectar to commence with, but how soon, through our fault entirely, of course, they turn into very gall!"

Lady Fantyre chuckled again; she was a wise old woman, in her way, and enjoyed nothing more than a hit at her own sex. To be sure, she was leaving the field very fast, and, perhaps, grudged the new combatants her cast-off weapons.

"True enough, Colonel; yet, if one may believe naughty stories, the flavor's been one uncommonly to your taste."

Sabretasche shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear lady, according to De Vigne's theory, can one put aside the Falernian because there will be some amari aliquid at the bottom of the glass? Nobody loved the beau sexe better than Mahomet, yet he learned enough from his favorite almond eyes to create his heaven without women!"

"What a heathen you are, Sabretasche!" cried De Vigne. "If I were Miss Trefusis, I wouldn't speak to you!"

"My dear fellow, I could support it!" said Sabretasche, naïvely, with such delicious Brummelian impudence that I believe Lady Fantyre could have kissed him—a favor for which the Colonel would have been anything but grateful.

The Trefusis's eyes glared; De Vigne, sitting next her, did not catch their expression, or I think, though he might be getting mad about her, he would not have taken the trouble to look so tenderly at her, and whisper, "If he could bear it, *I* could not."

"Yes you could," said the Trefusis, through her pearly teeth. "You would make me the occasion for an epigram on female caprice, and go and pay the same compliments to Lady Turquoise or Coralie the danseuse. I never knew the man who could not support, with most philosophic indifference, the cruelty of one woman if he had another to turn to, provided she had not left him for some other man, when, perhaps, his pride might be a little piqued."

De Vigne smiled; he was pleased to see her annoyed.

"Well, we are philosophic in self-defense, probably; but you are mistaken in thinking so lightly of the wounds you give, and I am sorry you should be so, for you will be more likely to refuse to what you fancy a mere scratch the healing touch that you might, perhaps, be persuaded to

accord if you were more fully aware of the harm you had done."

De Vigne's eyes glowed darker, till he looked as if he really meant it, but Sabretasche interrupted him.

"Talking of wounds, De Vigne? My dear fellow, who gets them now? This vanilla cream is excellent, Lady Fantyre. Vanilla is a very favorite flavor of mine. The surest way of wounding, if such a thing be possible when the softest little ingénue wears a chain-armor of practical egotism, is to keep invulnerable yourself. Miss Trefusis teaches us that."

"Curse the fellow!" muttered De Vigne.

He liked Sabretasche cordially, but he could have kicked him at that moment with an intense degree of pleasure.

"You know the world, Colonel," smiled old Fantyre. "I like men who do: they amuse one. When one's been behind the scenes one's self, those poor silly fools who sit in front of the stage, and believe in Talma's strut and Siddons's tears, in the rouge and the paint, and the tinsel and the trap-doors, do tire one so. You talk of your ingénues; I'm sure they're the most stupid lot possible."

"Except when they're ingénues de Saint Lô," laughed De Vigne.

"Which most of them are," said the Fantyre. "Take my word for it, my dear, if you find a woman extra simple, sweet, and prudish, you will be no match for her. Sherry's a very pleasant, light, innocent sort of wine, but strychnine's sometimes given in it, you know, for all that; and if a girl cast her eyes down more timidly than usual, you may be pretty sure those eyes have looked on queerer scenes than you fancy."

"To be sure," said De Vigne. "I would a good deal sooner have to deal with an Athénaïs de Mortemar than

with a Françoise d'Aubigné. I should be on my guard against the wicked little Montespan, but I should be no match for Sainte Maintenon. 'C'est trop contre un mari' (or un amant) 'd'être coquette et dévote: une femme devrait opter.'"

"Then, when you marry, you will take your wife out of a guinguette rather than a convent?" asked the old lady, with a comical smile.

He smiled too, and stroked his moustaches. The Trefusis shot a keen, rapid, hard glance at him, as he said, "Come, come, Lady Fantyre, is there no medium?"

"Between prudes and Aspasia?" said her shrill little treble. "No, sir—not that I ever saw—and les extrêmes se touchent, you know."

"Hush! hush!" cried Sabretasche, "you will corrupt me, Lady Fantyre—positively you will—and you will make me think shockingly of all my kind, soft-voiced, soft-skinned friends."

"Somebody has made you think as badly of us as you can," said the sharp old woman. "Not I. What do you think of that Moselle, Captain de Vigne?"

He thought it good, but not so good as the Trefusis, who acted out the song, "Drink to me with thine eyes, love," in a manner eminently calculated to intoxicate him more than all the wine ever pressed from Rhenish vineyards. And when she took a little dainty cigarette between her ruby lips, and leant back on her favorite rose velvet couch, leaning her white arm upon it, so that its rounded lines might show, laughing at the Fantyre cancan, and flashing on De Vigne her brightest glances, even Sabretasche and I, who were set against her by that most dogged thing, a prejudice, could not deny that a finer woman had never worried a man's peace of mind out of him, or sent him headlong into follies which close ever his

head and shut out all chance of a fairer future or a wiser path.

"Come in and smoke a pipe, Arthur," said De Vigne, when we had at length left the Fantyre petit souper, and Sabretasche had gone to his lansquenet at Hollingsworth's. "'Tisn't worth while going anywhere else to-night; it's three now. I have some splendid Glenlivet, (how naturally one offers a Cantab something to drink! as naturally as to a cabman, I declare,) and I shall like a chat with you. Hallo! here's my number. Confound it! why do they build town-houses all alike, that one can't know one's own by a particular mark, as the mother in the novels always knows her stolen child. Symmetry? Oh! that's like Sabretasche. One wants symmetry in a racer, I allow it, but in one's lodging-house I could put up without it, rather than pull up Vivandière on her haunches twice for nothing. Where's my latch-key? Confound the obstinacy of inanimate objects; it beats the obstinacy of a theorist on modern ethics. Right on, up the stairs. I'll follow you. By George! who's that smoking in my rooms? It can't be Harris, because I gave him leave to go to Cremorne, and not come home till morning, in time to fill my bath. It is tobacco, Arthur. What a devilish impertinence!"

He pushed open the door. On De Vigne's pet sofa, with Puck on his knees, a French novel in his hand, and a meerschaum in his lips, lay lazy, Sybaritish, girlish-looking, light-hearted "Little Curly."

"Curly!" cried De Vigne. "By Jove, how delighted I am! Little Curly! Where, in Heaven's name, did you spring from, my boy?"

"I sprang from nowhere," responded Curly, taking his pipe out of his mouth. "I've given up gymnastics, they're too tiring. I drove down in a cab that privately informed me it had just taken six cases of scarlet fever and three of

smallpox to the hospitals, from Meurice's, whither I arrived two hours ago, and where I had some hock that was ambrosia, but a chambermaid with red hair, fit to turn it all sour; and after digesting and recovering both of which, I thought I'd come and look after you. I found you were out—of course I knew you would be—and with the philosophy that always characterizes my slightest movements, took Le Brun, found out a pipe, (how well you brown yours, by the way,) and made myself jolly."

"Quite right," responded De Vigne, who was a perfect Arab for hospitality. "Delighted to see you. We were mentioning you to-day, and wishing you were up here, weren't we, Arthur? We're quite a Frestonhills reunion. What a pity the Doctor is not here, and dear Arabella. But I say, Curly, have you got quit of Granta, like this disreputable fellow, or are you only run up on leave, or how is it?"

"Don't you remember my degree was given me this year because I am a peer's son?" asked Curly, reprovingly. "See what it is to be a Goth without a classical education. You *should* have gone to Granta, De Vigne, you'd have been stroke of the Cambridge Eight, not a doubt of it. There's muscle gone to waste! It's very jolly, you see, being an Honorable, though I never knew it; one gets credit for brains whether one has them or not. What an inestimable blessing to some of the pillars of the aristocracy, isn't it? I suppose the House of Lords was instituted on that principle, and its members are no more required to know why they pass their bills than we, their sons and heirs, are required to know why we pass our examinations."

"And what are you going to do with yourself now?" said De Vigne. "For the present you'll keep on that sofa, and make yourself whisky-toddy; but après?"

“Après? Well, the governor wanted me to go in for diplomacy, but I wasn’t up to it—lies are not my genre, they’re too much trouble; so I demonstrated to him that it was clearly my mission to drink brandy, distract women, run into debt, curse parade, turn out on show days, move from Windsor to Knightsbridge, and back from Knightsbridge, and otherwise enjoy life, and swear at ennui with you fellows in the Queen’s. His mind was not open to it at first, but I soon improved his limited vision, and my name’s now down at the Horse Guards, where, after a little neat jobbery, I dare say the thing’ll soon be done.”

“Is your governor manageable?” said I.

Curly yawned, and opened his blue eyes a little wider.

“Of course; I should cut him if he wasn’t. You see he’s a snob, (I wanted him to put on his carriage pannel

Who’d have thought it?

Cotton bought it!

but he declined,) and my mother’s a Dorset; gave her title for his yellows. Now my brother Gus, poor devil! is the regular parvenu breed: short, thick, red whiskers, snub nose, and all the rest of it, while I, as you see, gentlemen,” said Curly, glancing at himself with calm, complacent vanity, “am a remarkably good-looking fellow, eminently presentable and creditable to my progenitors: a second Spurina, and a regular Dorset. Therefore, the governor hates Gus, (sneaky I consider it, as it is through his remarkable likeness to him that Gus is fit to frighten his looking-glass,) but adores me, and lets me twist him round this little finger of mine, voyez-vous?”

Curly didn’t add that this twisting process was generally applied for the benefit of his ill-favored elder, for Curly, like many of those who are worth the most, delighted in representing himself as worth nothing.

“And how’s Julia?” asked De Vigne.

Curly looked as savage as *he* could look.

“Julia? Confound her! how should I know? She’s been and hooked some old boy or other, I believe, poor devil!”

“Who’s the poor devil?” laughed De Vigne; “the man for being caught, or you for being deserted? Take comfort, Curly; there never was a man jilted yet who didn’t return thanks for it twelve months after. When I was twenty, and went over to Canada for six weeks’ buffalo-hunting, I fell mad in love with a great Toronto beauty, a sheriff’s widow. Such ankles she had, and didn’t she show them just on the Ontario! It was really one of the most serious affairs I ever had, and she flirted à outrance, till she flirted me into a downright proposal. The most wide-awake man commits such *bêtises* when he is young. But who should come on the scene just then but a rich old fur-merchant, with no end of dollars, and a tremendous house at New York; and my little widow, thinking I was very young, and knowing nothing whatever of Vigne and its belongings, quietly threw me over, foreswore all the pretty things we’d said to one another in sledging and skating, and went to live at New York among the Broadway belles. I swore and suffered horribly; she turned the pampas into swamps, and absolutely made me utterly indifferent to bison. I lived on pipes and soda-water for a week, and recovered; but when I ran over to America last winter to see Egerton of the Rifles, I met in Quebec a dreadful woman, ten stone at the least, in a bright-green dress, with blue things in her hair and rubies for her jewels, her skin as yellow as gold, and as wrinkled as the Fautyre’s; and I might have married that woman, with her shocking broad English, and her atrocious ‘Do tell!’ What fervent thanks I returned for the fur-merchant’s creation and my own

preservation! So will you, Curly, when, ten years hence, you happen to drop in at the Snoozeinrest Rectory, and find Julia as stiff as her brown paper-tracts, and as vinegar as the moral lessons she gives her parishioners, restricting her pastor and master to three glasses, and making your existence miserable at dessert by the entrance of four or five brats with shrill voices and monkey propensities; who make you look at them and their mother with a thrill of the deepest rapture, rejoicing that, thank Heaven, you are not a family man!"

De Vigne spoke the truth. Why the deuce did not he remember that his passion for the Trefusis might be quite as utterly misplaced as his fancy for the Toronto widow, or the Cantab's flirtation with Miss Julia? But, ah me! if the truth were always in our minds, or the future always plain before us, should we make the fifty false steps that the wisest man among us is certain to rue before half his sands are run? If they knew that before night was down the sea foam would be whirling high, and the curlews screaming in human fear, and the gay little boat lying keel upward on the salt ocean surf, would the pleasure party set out so fearlessly in the morning sunshine, with champagne flowing and bright eyes glancing, and joyous laughter ringing over the golden sands and up to the fleecy heavens?

II.

WHAT WAS UNDER THE CARDS.

THAT night, after we were gone, old Fantyre sat with her feet on the fender of her dressing-room, sans wig, teeth rouge, cosmetique, velvet, or lace; and an uncommonly hideous old woman she must have looked in that guise!

am certain, though, thank Heaven! I cannot speak to the fact from ocular observation. The Trefusis sat there, too, looking all the handsomer for dishabille, in a cerise-hued peignoir and fur slippers, and her thick long raven hair unbraided, and hanging to her waist.

"My dear," began the Fantyre, "do you think you hold the trumps in that game you're playing?"

"Certainly I do. Why?"

"Because I'm not so sure. You're playing fast and loose with De Vigne, and that don't always succeed. Brummel said to me, 'If we pique a woman, she is ours.' That's true enough with us, because we're such fools; nine times out of ten a woman don't care a rush for a man who's dying at her feet, while she's crazy about some ugly brute who takes no more notice of her than he does of his dirty boots. Women love to go to heel, and they'll crawl after a man who double-thongs them in preference to one who lets them rate him. Besides, we're jealous; we hate one another like poison from our cradles, and if a man neglects us we fancy he likes somebody else, and of course, that's quite enough to make us want to trap him away from her, whoever she be. But with men sometimes it's a dangerous game. They're the most impatient creatures in creation, and if one trout won't rise to the fly, they go off and whip another stream. All fish are alike pretty well to 'em, so that they fill their baskets. Men's aim is pleasure, and if you don't give it to 'em they will go somewhere else for it."

"True enough," said the Trefusis; "but, at the same time, to a good many men difficulty is everything. Men of hot passion and strong will delight in pursuit, and soon grow tired of victory. They enjoy knocking the bird over; that done, it loses all interest for them. De Vigne is such a man; rouse his pride, you win him—yield easily, he loses his interest, and you miss him."

"Maybe, my dear—maybe. You know him better than I do, and must manage him as you choose. I dare say he does like climbing over spikes and chevaux-de-frise to get what he fancies; he's the stamp of creature that's never happy out of excitement or danger, and Montaigne thinks like you: 'Elles nous battent mieux en fuyant, comme les Scythes.' How racy his old French is! I wish I had known that man! I say, Constance, those two friends of his shouldn't be with him too much, for they don't like us. One's that boy Chevasney."

"Boy, indeed!" echoed the Trefusis.

"But De Vigne is fond of him?"

"I believe so, but De Vigne is never influenced by anybody."

"I hope he may not be, except by you, and that won't be to his advantage, poor fellow! He's a very handsome pigeon, my dear—a very handsome one indeed!" chuckled the old lady. "But the other one is more dangerous than Chevasney; I mean that beautiful creature—what's his name?—Vivian Sabretasche. He don't think much about us, I dare say, but he don't like us. He sees through us, my dear, and, ten to one, he'll put De Vigne on his guard."

"De Vigne listens to nobody who comes between him and his passion of the moment; and how is it possible that Sabretasche should see through us, as you term it?"

"Not all our hand, my dear, but one or two cards. That calm nonchalant way of his conceals a wonderful deal of keen observation—too keen for us. Vivian Sabretasche is very witty and very careless, and the world tells very light stories of him; but he's a man that not Satan himself could deceive."

"Well, nobody wants to deceive him."

"Don't you want to marry his friend?"

"Enough of that, Lady Fantyre. I will neither be lec-

tured or schooled. You agreed to help me, but you agreed, too, to let me succeed in my own way. I tell you, I know how to manage him, and that before this year is out, in spite of Chevasney, Sabretasche, or anybody—yes, in spite of *himself*—I shall be Granville de Vigne's wife."

"I wish you may, my dear," said the Fantyre, with another chuckle. "Well, don't talk to me any more, child. Get Le Brun, will you, and read me to sleep."

III.

A DOUBLED-DOWN PAGE IN THE COLONEL'S BOOK OF LIFE.

WHAT a pace one lives at through the season! and, when one is fresh to it, before one knows that its pleasant, frothy, syllabub surface is only a cover to intrigues, petty spites, jealousies, partisanships, manœuvres—alike in St. Stephen's as at Almack's; among uncompromising patriots as among poor foreigners farming private banks round about St. James's Street; among portly aristocratic mothers, trotting out their innocent daughters to the market, as among the gauze-winged, tinseled, hard-worked deities of the coulisses—how agreeable it is! Illusion in one's first season lasts, I think, about the space of one month. With its blissful bandeau over our eyes, we really do admire the bellés of the Ring and the Ride; we go to balls to dance, and to dinners for society; we swallow larks for ortolans, and Cremorne gooseberry for Clicquot's; we believe in the innocent demoiselles, who look so naïve, and such sweet English rosebuds at morning fêtes, and do not dream those glossy braids cover empty but world-shrewd little heads, ever plotting how to eclipse dearest Cecilia or

win old Hauton's coronet; we accept their mammas invitations, and think how kindly they are given, not knowing that we are only asked because we bring Shako of the Guards with us, who is our bosom chum, and has fifteen thousand a year, and that, Shako fairly hooked, we, being a younger son, shall be gently dropped. We go to the Lords and Commons, and believe A. when he says he has the deepest admiration for his noble friend B., whom he hates like poison, and reverence D. when he pleads for the liberty of "the people," whom over his claret he classifies as "beastly snobs." We regard the coulisses with delight, as a temple whose eleusinia it is high honor to penetrate, and fall veritably in love with all those fair nymphs fluttering their spirit veils at Willis's, or clanking their spurs as Mazurka maidens. That delightful state of faith lasts about a month, then we discard the bandeau, and use an eye-glass instead; learn to confine ourselves to "Not bad-looking" before the handsomest Galatea in the Park; find out that dinners are a gathering to consume hock and turbot, but not by any means bound to furnish society; pronounce balls a bore, and grow critical of Moët's; are careful of the English rosebuds, knowing that, kept out of view, those innocent petals have thorns, which they know well how to thrust out and dextrously impale us on them; we take mammas' invitations at their worth, and watch the dragon's teeth opening for that luckless Shako, with grim terror of a similar fate; we laugh over rum-punch with a chum of ours, a whip in the Commons, who lets us into a thing or two concerning the grandiose jobbery of Downing Street, and finds out that coulisses atmosphere, however agreeable, is no exclusive boon; that its sesame is a bracelet to the first dancer, who, though she may take a Duke's brougham, is not insensible to even a Cornet's tribute if it come from Hunt and Roskill, and we give less

love and more Cremorne lobster-salad to the Willis and Mazurka maidens.

Such, at least, was my case; and when I was fairly in the saddle and off at a pace, like a Doncaster favorite's, through my first season, enjoyed it considerably, even when the bandeau *was* off my eyes, which, thanks to De Vigne and Sabretasche, took place very speedily.

Of De Vigne I did not see so much as if no Trefusis had been in being, for he was constantly after her, going with her to morning concerts, or Richmond luncheons; riding with her in the Park; lending her a horse too, by the way, for that showy bay of hers had come out of Bruton Mews, and no livery-stable mount is fit for any mortal, much less a female; attending her everywhere, but not as yet "compromising" himself, as, according to the peculiar code of honor in such cases, we may give a girl a bracelet with impunity to ourselves, but are lost if we hazard a diamond circlet for her "third finger." That comes rather hard on those poor women, by the way, for Lovelace may talk, and look, and make love in every possible style, yet, if he stops short of the "essential question," Lovelace may go scot free. We shall remark what a devil of a girl it is to flirt, and her sworn allies, who have expressed sympathy to her in crossed notes of the fondest pathos, agree among themselves "How conceited poor Laura is to fancy Lovelace *could* be serious! Why, dear, all that means nothing; only Laura, poor thing! has had so little attention, she doesn't know what it is. If she had had a man mad about her, as you and I have had, love—ah! do you remember poor Frank Cavendish at the race ball?" Whereon the sworn allies scent their vinaigrettes, indulging pleasurable recollections, and Lovelace burns Laura's lock of hair that he asked for under the limes in the moonlight; thinks "How deucedly near I was! must be more careful next

time," and wonders what sort of girls he shall find at Brighton.

De Vigne, however, as long as he would not come well up to hand, received no such flirting kindnesses from the Trefusis, not even so much as a note to thank him for his concert tickets, or a flower from the very bouquet he had sent her. Perhaps she knew by clairvoyance that her Cambridge azalea had gone ignominiously into the grate, for she tried on that style no more, but was coy and reserved, as if Hannah More had been her chaperone instead of bad old Sarah Lady Fantyre. That worried, excited, and roused De Vigne, and I saw, without needing much penetration, that he was drinking deeper and deeper of a stimulant which he never refused when it was fairly to his lips, and which brings worse follies, and wilder deeds, and more resistless delirium to men than lie in the hottest draught of Falernian, or a thousand grains of opium. Sabretasche and I used to swear at the power of the Trefusis, and lament De Vigne's infatuation together, but we could do nothing to weaken either: opposition to a man in love is like oil to fire.

Sabretasche was remarkably kind to me: he introduced me in his set, one of the most intellectual, exclusive, and raffiné in town; he admitted me to his charming dinners, a sort of Plato's banquets, where modern Pausaniases and Aristophanes met to discuss witty topics over choice cookery; and he let me into his studio, the most luxurious miniature art palace possible, where, when employed on his marble or his canvas—and no amateur skill was his either—no one was ever allowed to disturb him. His house was not large; he avowed a mortal dislike to a wilderness of a dwelling with enormous rooms and draughty galleries, but it was in exquisite taste. Noiseless footmen moved about

it in subdued liveries; the library was full of every provocation to literary gormandism; the drawing-rooms were of classic elegance, for he suffered no upholsterer to overload and overgild his rooms; the smoking-room was of epicurean comfort; the conservatories were full of every flower out of the Flora of every nation, I verily believe; and, finally, his "own room" was the essence of all the others, with flowers, pictures, busts, books, statuettes, a grand piano, and every style of lounging-chair, and opened out of his beloved studio, only divided from it by a massive curtain of green, bordered with gold. Yes, decidedly, Sabretasche knew to perfection the great art, "How to live," and he had every facility for enjoying life—riches, refined taste, art, intellect, hundreds of men who sought him, scores of women who courted him, a facile wit, a sweet temper—yet, somehow or other, you could trace in him a certain shadow, often dissipated, it is true, in the sunshine of his gay words and the music of his laugh, but certain to creep over him again an intangible shade of disappointment. Perhaps he had exhausted life too early; perhaps his excessive refinement was jarred by the very pleasures he sought; perhaps the intellectual and classic mould of his mind was not, after all, satisfied with the sedatives he gave it, though he devoted as many hours to his studio and library as to the boudoir and the card-room; however, as for speculating on Sabretasche, all town pretty well did that, more or less, but nobody in town was ever any the wiser for it. One morning I was going to breakfast with him; his nominal breakfast-hour was noon, though I believe he often rose very much earlier, took a cup of coffee à la Balzac, and chipped, or read, or painted in his studio. I took my way across the Gardens to Sabretasche's house, which was at the Marble-arch end of Park Lane, taking that détour for motives of my own. Gwen-

dolina Brandling, 'Curly's eldest sister, an exquisite nymph of eighteen, with crêpé hair, had confided to me the previous day, over strawberry-ice, at a fête at Twickenham, that she was in the habit of accompanying her smaller sisters in their morning walk with their governess, to "put her in mind of the country," and the Hon. Gwen being a fresh, honest-hearted, and exceedingly nice-looking girl, I took my way through the Gardens about eleven, looking out for Curly's sister among the pretty nursemaids, ugly children, and abominable, ankle-breaking, dress-tearing perambulators, that filled the walks. There was no Hon. Gwendolina at present, and I threw myself down under one of the trees, put my eye-glass in my eye, and took out that day's *Punch*, to while away the time till Gwen and her cameriste might come in sight. I was reading those delicious "Snob Papers," by that superb master of social satire, that cordial hater of frauds and follies, that genial lover of all that *might be* so noble, true, and earnest in human nature, whom it cuts me to the heart to think should ever so far consult the milk-and-water bias of the day as to tell us in the "Cornhill" (by-the-by, why that title? is it, by way of chaff, to intimate to us that we are to find tares instead of rich ripe wheat?) that he will always remember that "the ladies and children are at the table," forgetting that the time when the children come to dessert is the hour of abomination to everybody, and that it is when the ladies are gone and the claret goes round that the talk grows wise and witty, that graver questions are discussed, and stories worth hearing told. Oh, Lion! you love strong meat yourself; give it to those who reverence you, and catch at any crumbs that fall from your table.

I was immersed in those delicious cuts at snobbism, when an angry voice fell on my ear, speaking rapidly in Italian. I knew Italian well, a Neapolitan governess

having brought me up while I was in petticoats, and the words fell distinctly on my ear.

“Come, signor, why waste time about it? You know that your secret is worth more than I ask. You know you would give half your riches to make sure it would never be known by anybody, to efface it altogether, eh, *eccellenza*? Come! I ask a very low price; not worth jangling about; no more to you than a few scudi to me. Why waste time? You know I can bring her over in twenty-four hours, and then——”

“Take it, and begone!”

Ye gods! that last voice, cold, contemptuous, with a thorough-bred ring in it, though full of concentrated disgust and wrath, I recognized as Vivian Sabretasche's. Involuntarily I turned to look. Yes, it *was* he; our over-exclusive, over-refined Sabretasche; the most fastidious and the proudest man in town, in company with a shabbily though showily-dressed fellow, with rings on his fingers and an imperial on his chin, and a handsome, vulgar, insolent face, that wore at that minute as abominably avaricious and insulting a smile as ever was seen, as the Colonel shoved a roll of bank-notes into his hand, a passion of loathing and impatience quivering over his delicate features. The man laughed a laugh as impudent as his smile.

“Thank you, signor, a thousand thanks. I won't trouble you again till—I'm again in difficulties.”

Sabretasche gave him no answer, but turning his back upon the man, folded his arms upon his chest, and walked away across the Gardens, with his head bent down, while the fellow counted the notes with glistening, triumphant eyes, crushed them up as if he loved their crisp new rustle, stroked his beard, whistled an air from “Figaro,” and strolled on toward the gate, leaving me in a state of the

profoundest amazement at the vulgar acquaintance the fastidious Colonel had selected, and the secret by which this under-bred foreigner seemed able to hold in check so profound a man of the world as Sabretasche.

Just at this minute, Gwendolina and her duenna appeared in the distance, and I, dropping my eye-glass, went to meet them, lifted my hat with a surprised smile of pleasure, and talked of Grisi and Mario, of Balfe's new song, and Sims Reeves's last concert, with the hundred topics current in the season, while the little ones ran about, and the French governess chatted and laughed, and Gwen smiled and looked like a sunbeam, and told me about her ponies and dogs and flowers down in Hampshire. Poor Gwen! She is Madame la Duchesse de Vieillecour now, not over happy, I fear, despite the diamonds I saw flashing on her brow and neck last night at the Tuileries; in the gorgeous glories of her Champs Elysées hotel, in the light beauty of her summer villa at Enghien, in the gloomy state and magnificence of her château in the Côte d'Or, whose massive iron gates close like a death-knell, does she ever think, I wonder, of those spring mornings in the Gardens when *she* was in her spring-time too?

It was just twelve when I reached the Colonel's house. I was shown straight to his own room; and there he lay on one of the couches, calm, cool, imperturbable as ever, not a trace visible of his past excitement and irritation, very unlike a man with a secret hanging over his head and darkening his life. He stretched out his hand with a kind smile.

"Well, Arthur. Good morning to you. You are just in time for the match. Du Loo has not been here five minutes."

Du Loo was a heavy, good-humored, stupid fellow in the Blues, who prided himself on his fine teeth and his boxing,

and who was going, at half-past twelve, to have a little play with Fighting Chatney, one of the Fancy, who let himself out to beat gentlemen, in order that gentlemen might learn to beat

On the carpet at Sabretasche's feet lay a great retriever, the one thing in the whole world for which he cared, chiefly, I believe, because it had trusted itself to his kindness.

"Poor old Cid!" said he, pausing in his breakfast to set the dog down some larded guinea-fowl. "I spoil him for sport, you say? Perhaps; but I don't want him for sport, and I make his life comfortable. I see, in him, one thing in this Via Dolorosa that is perfectly content and happy; and it is a treat to see it. He was a stray pup that followed me all the way from Woolwich to Kensington. I did not notice him at the time, but when I awoke the next morning he had rolled himself up in a ball on my bed, and was rubbing his nose against my cheek. That is two years ago. Cid and I have been fast friends ever since, and we love one another, don't we, old boy?"

The Cid looked up at him with two honest, tender brown eyes, and wagged his tail. Sabretasche had talked to him till, I believe, the dog understood him quite as well as I did.

"There are lots of women, Colonel," said Du Loo, "who'd bid high for the words you throw away on that dog."

"Possibly. But are any of them as faithful, and honest, and worthy, as my Cid? The Cid would like broken bones and a barn with me as well as French cookery and velvet cushions. I'm sorry I couldn't say as much for your fair ladies, Du Loo."

"The devil! no," yawned the Guardsman. "Catch a woman giving up her opera-box and her milliner! Why, the other night I saw Nelly Lacquers, the British Beggars'

Bank man's wife, got up no end at the Silverton Drum, laughing and talking, waltzing, and carrying pearls worth two thousand; and, by George! if there isn't a warrant out against her husband this morning for swindling! Mustn't she be a horrid, heartless little bit of flippery?"

"It doesn't follow," said Sabretasche. "Most likely he sent her there to disarm suspicion, while he sent off his specie to France or America, and got his passport to Calais. I never judge people: seemingly bad actions may have good motives, good ones may spring from base and selfish ends. 'Judge not, lest ye be judged.' When will the world take that gentle injunction to heart? Never! It loves to quote 'An eye for an eye,' 'Salvation is far from the wicked,' and 'Depart from me, ye accursed;' but it is singularly oblivious of the 'Mote and the beam,' of 'From your hearts forgive every one his trespasses,' and 'He that is without sin among you, let him cast a stone at her.' If a man breaks his leg, he thinks it a 'sad accident,' a 'great affliction;' if he sees his friend break his, he has no hesitation in pronouncing it 'a judgment.'"

Du Loo stared at him.

"What the deuce, Colonel, are *you* turning sermon-izer?"

"No, my dear fellow, I have enough conscience still left not to preach before practicing; though truly, if that were a rule, few of our pulpits would be filled. But I have one virtue—tolerance; therefore I may preach *that*. How can we presume to pronounce verdicts on each other when we know so little of the inner life; the real motives, actions, or position of men with whom one is in daily intercourse? Vices there are, of course, on which law and public feeling must execute justice for the preservation of any comfort or any virtue; but even there, surely, if one 'hate the sin,' one may 'love the sinner;' and we have a great deal too much

to do—looking at home—to have either leisure or right to carp at others, much less to condemn them. There is your friend, Fighting Chatney. Now for your seventh heaven, Du Loo.”

“And yours too, Sabretasche?”

“No. I learnt to hold the belt; of course I should be sorry for another man to be able to beat me in any game; but there is a degree of absurdity in two mortals setting solemnly to work to pommel one another; there is something unpoetic, and coarse, and savage, about blood and bruises, and, besides, it is so much exertion. However, go at it; it is for Arthur’s delectation, and I can go into my studio if I am tired.”

Du Loo and his pet of the fancy retired to the far end of the room, and there set-to, delivering from the left shoulder, and drinking as much beer between their rounds as a couple of draymen. As the match had been arranged for my express pleasure, of course I watched it with the deepest interest, though Sabretasche’s remarks gave the noble art a certain degree of ludicrousness, mingled with the admiration with which I had been accustomed to regard such “little mills.” Du Loo finally floored the bruiser, to his own extreme glorification, while the pet very generously growled out to him that he might be as great a man as the Tipton Slasher, if he would train himself properly. Du Loo left, and Sabretasche asked me to stay ten minutes to let him finish a picture which he had been amusing himself by taking of me in crayons—a portrait, by the way, which is a far better one than any I have ever had done by R. A.’s, and which my mother still cherishes devotedly at Longholme.

“What a strange fellow Du Loo is,” said the Colonel, “or, rather, what a commonplace one! The man’s greatest delight is a Moulsey mill, and his ambitions are locked

up in the brutalities of the Ring. Of any higher world—of the world of imagination and ideal, of affections and aspirations—he is utterly ignorant. Talk to him of the intellectual thirst of the more refined charms, which we, who are lovers of art and genius, feel and enjoy, you might as well discourse to him in Hebrew. Take him out under the summer stars, make him listen to the silvery chimes of the night, place him amid the deep and holy silence of nature, he would look bored, yawn, and ask for his cigar. Positively, Arthur, he makes one feel one's link to the animals mortifyingly close. In truth, the distance between the zoophytes and man is not wider than the great gulf between a Goethe and a prize-fighter, is it? It is proportion of brain which makes the master superior to his dog; why should not different proportion of brain make as distinct a mark between the clod of the valley and the cultured scholar or poet? Truly, men are born stamped by nature helots and masters, and the master will assert his supremacy, whether the "coal from the altar" be laid on his lips from the ingle-nook of a cottage or the censer of a palace. But why am I talking all this to you? You have more amusing occupation than to listen to my fancies. Turn a little nearer the light. That is it! Have you seen De Vigne to-day?"

"No; he was gone to Albert Smith's with the Trefusis and Fantyre, confound them! Do you think she will win, Colonel?"

"My dear boy, how can I tell? I think she will if she can. 'Donne gentile devote d'amore' generally manage to marry a man if they have full play with him. If De Vigne only saw her in morning calls when his head was cool, and others were with him, possibly he might keep out of it; but she waltzes with him—she waltzes remarkably well, too—she shoots Parthian glances at him in the tête-à-tête

of conservatories, after the mess champagne; moreover, ten to one, in some of those soft moments, he will say more than, being a man of honor, he can unsay."

"And be cursed for life."

"Possibly. Love does that for a good many, and on the baseless fantasy of early eye-love many men have surrendered their entire lives to one who has made them a blank! Troublesome eyes yours are, Arthur. I can't make out their color. What present will you give Mrs. De Vigne on her wedding-day?"

"Confound her, none!" I shouted. "He's a vast deal too good for fifty such as she—a cold, calculating, ambitious, loveless woman——"

"One would think you were in love with her yourself, Chevasney. Let me catch that terrific expression, it would do for a Jupiter Tonans."

"And she is so wretchedly clever!" I groaned.

"In artifice! yes; by education! no. Her knowledge is utterly superficial. I cannot imagine where she has lived. She speaks shockingly ungrammatical French, with a most atrocious English accent; she neither plays nor sings. We were speaking of Granvella the other day; she fancied him a poet. We referred to Mont Thabor; she did not know who had fought there. Yet she waltzes, rides, and dresses splendidly, and has a shrewd, sharp sarcasm, which passes muster as wit among her admirers. In fact, she is a paradox; and I shall regret nothing more than to see De Vigne misled out of his right senses by her magnificent beauty, stooping to tie himself for life to a woman with whom he will have nothing in common—who will have neither feeling to satisfy his heart nor mind to satisfy his intellect, and with whom I would bet great odds a week after the honeymoon he will be disgusted."

"Can't you persuade him?" I began. He stopped me

with an expressive gesture; he had much of the Italian gesticulation.

“Persuade?” Mon garçon, if you want to force a man into any marriage, persuade him against it. Tell a man not to fall in love, and he will fall in love straightway. No one should touch love affairs. Third persons are certain to barbotter the whole thing. The more undesirable the connection, and the more you interfere, the more surely will the ‘subject’ grow obstinate as a mule under your treatment. Call a person names to anybody over whom she has cast a glamour, and if he have anything of the gentleman or the lover in him, out of sheer amour propre, and a sort of wrong-headed, right-hearted chivalry, he will swear to you she is an angel.”

“And believe it, perhaps.”

“Most likely, until she is his wife! There is a peculiar magic in that gold circlet, badge of servitude for life, which changes the sweetest, gentlest, tenderest fiancée into the stiffest of domestic tyrants. Don’t you know that, before marriage, a lady ‘loves to see gentlemen smoke, it is so manly;’ and, after it, ‘never allows that filthy tobacco in her house.’ Don’t you know that, when she’s engaged to him, she is so pretty and pleasant with his men friends, passes over the naughty stories she hears of him from ‘well-intentioned’ advisers, and pats the new mare that is to be entered for the Chester Cup; twelve months after the quarry is lured, his chums have the cold shoulder and the worst wine; she gives him fifty curtain orations on his disgraceful conduct with his cousin Julia, whom he ventured to take to one morning concert, while madame was in bed reading French novels. And as for racing—he daren’t mention it in her presence; hides his *Bell’s Life* as a schoolboy hides *Tristram Shandy*, and wonders if the peevish woman who comes down an hour too late for breakfast can

by any possibility be identical with the smiling bien coiffée young lady who poured his coffee out for him with such dainty fingers and pleasant words when he stayed down at her papa's for the shooting."

I laughed. "Don't ever get married yourself, Colonel, for the sake of Heaven, women, and consistency!"

He smiled too, as he answered :

"‘A young man married is a man that's marred.’ That's a golden rule, Arthur ; take it to heart. Anne Hathaway, I have not a doubt, suggested it. Experience is the best asbestos, only, unluckily, one seldom gets it before it is too late to use it, and one's hands are burned irrevocably. Shakspeare took to wife the ignorant, rosy-cheeked, Warwickshire peasant girl, at *eighteen* ! Poor fellow ! I picture him, with all his untried powers, struggling like newborn Hercules for strength and utterance, and the great germ of unspoken poetry within him tinging all the common realities of life with a rose hue ; the lion genius that was stirring in his heart giving him power to see with the God-like vision that is only given to the few ; the fairies nestling in the cowslip chalices, and the golden gleam of Cleopatra's sails, to feel the ‘spiced Indian air’ by night and the wild working of kings’ ambitious lust ; knowing, by the divine intuition of the creative force, alike the soft low chimes of nature unheard by common ears, and the fierce schemes and passions of a world from which social position shut him out. I see him in his hot imaginative youth finding his first love in the yeoman's daughter at Shottery, strolling with her by the Avon, making her an ‘odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds,’ and dressing her up in the fond array of a boy's poetic imaginings. Then—when he had married her, he, with the passionate ideals of Juliets and Violas, Ophelias and Hermiones in his brain and heart, must have awoke and found that the voices so

sweet to him were dumb to her. The 'cinque spotted cowslip-bells' brought only thoughts of wine to her; when he was watching 'certain stars shoot madly from their spheres,' she most likely was grumbling at him for mooning there after curfew-bell; when he was learning Nature's lore in 'the fresh cup of the crimson rose,' she was dinning in his ear that Hammet and Judith wanted worsted socks; when he was listening in fancy to the sea-maid's song, and feeling in his brain grow larger, clearer, fonder, the imaginings to which a world long ages after still stands reverentially to listen, she was buzzing behind him and bidding him go card the wool, and weeping that, in her girlhood, she had not chosen some rich glover or ale-taster, instead of idle, useless, wayward Willie Shakspeare. Poor fellow! I can picture him in his vehement youth and his regretful manhood. He did not write, without fellow-feeling and yearning over souls similarly shipwrecked, that wise saw 'A young man married is a man that's marred!' My dear Arthur, I beg your pardon. I am keeping you a most unconscionable time, but really your eyes are very troublesome. I say, some men are coming here for lansquenet to-night, will you come too? and do bring De Vigne if you can. One sees nothing of him now, and there are few so well worth seeing. What a wicked fellow I am, ladies would say, to lead you into high play. I can't think it myself; you would be led into it without me, and I see no more harm in high play than in making ducks and drakes of one's money after racers, pictures, subsoilings, model cottages, or any other hobby; and it has this advantage, that if one loses, one loses to one's friends. Besides, lansquenet rouses one a little; and what a blessing that is! Au revoir, mon cher. I have an immense deal of work before me. I am going to the Yard to bid for Steel Patterson's cream filly; then to the Twelfth's mess luncheon;

next I have an appointment to meet the Godolphin—all town's talking of that fair lady, so I reveal no secret; and après, I must dress to dine in Eaton Square, and I much question if any of them are worth the exertion they will cost me, except, indeed, the cream filly!"

Wherewith the Colonel dismissed me. As I saw him that night, when De Vigne and I went there for the promised lansquenet, courteous, urbane, gay, nonchalant, witty, I saw no trace of any mysterious secret, nor any lingering touch of the haughty anger and impatient disgust he had shown to his singular companion of the morning. But, then, no more did I see, what all the world said they saw, that Vivian Sabretasche was a heartless libertine, an unprincipled gambler, an egotist, a skeptic, a sinner of the deepest dye, to be condemned immeasurably in boudoir scandals and bishops' dinners, and only to be courted, and visited, and have his crimes passed over because he was rich and was the fashion.

PART THE FOURTH.

I.

THE LITTLE QUEEN OF THE FAIRIES.

"ARTHUR, who do you think has gone to the dogs through that rascally British Beggars' Bank?" said De Vigne one afternoon, unharnessing himself after one of the greatest bores in life, a field-day in Hyde Park, and talking from his bedroom to me, as I sat drinking sherry and Seltzer before going into my rooms in the barracks.

"How should I know, out of half a million," I responded

‘What an awfully warm day! Thank Heaven, there’ll soon be an end of the season!’

“Do you remember old Tressillian, of Weive Hurst?”

“Of course. The devil! you don’t mean him?”

“I am sorry to say I do; he has lost every penny. To think of that scoundrel, Sir John Lacquers, flinging Bible texts at your head, thrusting his charities into your face going to church every Sunday as regularly as a verger and to morning prayers on a week-day, building his alms houses and attending his ragged-schools, and now he’s cu. off to Boulogne, with a neat surplus, I’ll be bound, hidde: up somewhere; and widows, and children, and ruined gentlemen will reap the harvest he has sown! Bah! it makes one sick of humanity!”

“And is Tressillian one of his victims?”

“I believe you! I saw his name on the list some day ago, and on Monday, as I was riding out by Apsley House corner at a trot, Tally-ho saw fit to knock down a little girl, or, rather, I to let him; I ought to have been looking where I was going, instead of staring through my glass after the women in their barouches. There was an old gentleman with her, who picked her up, not hurt, but pretty considerably frightened; she was a pretty little thing, and didn’t cry naturally. I got off to apologize, and, to my surprise, recognized Boughton Tressillian. The little girl was the child that used to be at Weive Hurst—daughter—no, granddaughter, wasn’t she?”

“Little Alma. Yes. We used to say she’d be a pretty woman. Well, go on.”

“I was very pleased to see him. You know I always liked him exceedingly. I asked him where he was living; he said, with a smile, ‘In lodgings in Surrey Street; you know I can’t afford Maurigy’s now.’ And I called on him there yesterday; such a detestable lodging-house, Arthur!

Brummagem furniture and Irish maids ! He is just the same simple, courtly, old grand seigneur as ever. I'm not a susceptible man, as you know, nor a sentimental, but, I give you my honor, it cut me to the heart to see that gallant old fellow, whom we last knew down at Freston-hills as proud a country gentleman as any round, utterly beggared through that psalm-singing, pharisaical swindler, and bearing his reverses like the plucky French noblesse that my father used to shelter at Vigne after '98, and of whom my mother used to tell me tales, to show me, as she said, that a gentleman was a gentleman always, whatever his externals, while his honor was safe and his name untarnished."

"And has he nothing now ?"

"Nothing. His entire principal was placed in Lacquers's hands. Weive Hurst is gone to pay his creditors, and one can do nothing to aid him, he is so deucedly—no, not deucedly, but so *rightly* proud. Come with me to-day and see him ; we shall drive there in ten minutes, and we must be doubly attentive to him now. There will be just time between this and mess if you ring and tell them to bring the tilbury round."

The tilbury soon came round, and the new steel grays, tandem, (to the imminent danger of everybody's life that happened to be in the streets while they paced through them, though De Vigne was a magnificent whip, and his having run over Alma Tressillian did make him, for a wonder, rather mindful of the existence of applewomen and cabs,) soon set us down in Surrey Street.

One of the Irish maids that so excited De Vigne's disgust showed us up stairs. Mr. Tressillian was not at home, but was expected in every minute ; and we sat down to wait for him. Through the windows, on those dismal leads that admit to the denizens of Surrey Street a view of the

murky Thames and steam transports of the Cockneys, the little girl was standing, who, as soon as she caught sight of De Vigne, ran into the room and welcomed him with exceeding warmth and an accè of color that might have flattered him much had she been a few years older.

She was about ten or eleven, an awkward and angular age; but she had neither angles nor awkwardness, and was as pretty as they ever are in their growing time, with hair of that glistening burnished gold, bright in shade as in sunshine, and deep blue eyes, brilliant and dark under her black silken lashes, which promised, in due time, to do a good deal of damage. In her little dainty Paris-made dresses of soft white muslin and floating blue ribbons, the child looked ill fitted for the gloomy atmosphere of Surrey Street. Poor little thing! a few weeks before she had been the heiress of Weive Hurst, now, thanks to that godly creature, Sir John Lacquers, her future promised to be a struggle almost for daily bread.

"I am so glad you are come!" she exclaimed, running up to De Vigne. "Grandpapa will be so pleased to see you, and you will do him good. When he is alone he grows so sad, and I can do nothing to help him. I am no companion for him, and if I try to amuse him—if I sing to him, or talk, or draw—I think it only makes him worse: he remembers Weive Hurst still more!"

"Do you not miss Weive Hurst, Alma?" asked De Vigne.

The child's eyes filled with tears, and the blood rushed over her face.

"*Miss Weive Hurst!* Oh, you do not guess how much, or you would not ask me! My beautiful, darling Weive Hurst, with its grand waving trees, and its bright flowers, and its sweet sunshine! *Miss Weive Hurst!* In this cold, dark, smoky place, where I never see the sun, or hear

the birds, or feel the summer wind! *Miss Weive Hurst!* Where every flower knew me, and let me kiss it when it opened its eyes to the morning sun! *Miss Weive Hurst!——*”

And the little lady stopped in her vehement oration, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

“What an excitable little thing!” said De Vigne, raising his eyebrows; then he bent gently toward her, as courteously as if she had been the Duchess of Turquoises. “I beg your pardon, Alma; I am sorry if I vexed you. I could not know how much you loved your home; and perhaps—who knows?—you will go back to it again some day.”

She raised her head eagerly.

“Ah! if I could hope that!”

“Well, we *will* hope it!” smiled De Vigne. “Some of those flowers that love you so much will tell the fairies that sleep in their buds to come and fetch you back because they want to see their little queen.”

She looked at him half in surprise.

“Ah! you believe in fairies, then? I love you for that.”

“Thank you. Do you, then?”

“Of course,” said Alma, with the reproving tone of a believer in sacred creed to a heathenish skeptic. “Shakespeare did, you know. He writes of Ariel and Puck, Peasblossom and Cobweb, who ‘pluck the wings from painted butterflies,’ and ‘kill cankers in the musk rose-buds.’ Milton, too, believed in Fairy Mab and the Goblin, whose ‘shadowy flail had thrashed the corn that ten day-laborers could not end.’ Flowers would not be half flowers to *me* without their fairies, and, besides,” continued Miss Alma, with the decision of a person who clinches an argument, “I have seen them, too!”

"Indeed!" said De Vigne. "But so have I."

"Where?" asked Alma, breathless as a dilettante to whom one breathes tidings of a lost Corregio.

"There!" said De Vigne, lifting her up in his iron grasp before the high mirror on the mantle-piece.

She laughed, but turned upon him with injured indignation.

"What a shame! You do not believe in them one bit—not the least more than grandpapa. I will not love you now—no, never again!"

"My dear child," laughed De Vigne, "even your sex don't love and unlove *quite* in such a hurry. Don't you care for your grandpapa, then, because he has never seen fairies?"

"Care for grandpapa! O yes!" she cried, passionately, "as much as I hate—oh, *hate!*—those wretched, cruel men who have robbed him of his money. I would try not to care for Weive Hurst if he were happy, but he will never be happy without it any more than I."

"Do you remember me, Alma?" I asked, to change her thoughts.

She shook her head.

"Do you remember him?"

She looked very tenderly and admiringly on De Vigne.

"Oh yes! When I read 'Sintram,' I thought of him as Sir Folko."

De Vigne laughed.

"You bit of a child, what do you understand of 'Sintram?'"

"I understand Sir Folko, and I wish I had been Gertrude."

"Then you wish you had been my wife, mademoiselle?"

Alma considered gravely for a moment, looking steadily in De Vigne's face:

"Yes, I think I should like you to take care of me as he took care of Gertrude."

We went off into shouts of laughter, which Alma could not understand. She could not see she had said anything laughable.

"I thought you were never going to love me again, Alma? A wife ought to love her husband," said De Vigne.

Alma made a moue mutine and turned away, her blue ribbons and her gold hair fluttering impatient defiance. Just then her grandfather came in, the stately, silver-haired, gentle-toned master of Weive Hurst.

"How do you do? cried De Vigne. "I am having an offer made me, Mr. Tressillian, though it is not leap year. I hope you will give your consent?"

"I will never marry anybody who does not believe in fairies," interrupted Alma, running back again to her leads.

"If she make a like proposal five or six years hence to any man, she'll hardly have it neglected," said I, when Tressillian had recalled who I was, and shaken hands with me.

Tressillian smiled sadly. "Her love will be a curse to her, poor child, for she will love too well; as for her being neglected, she will not have the gilding necessary to make youth protected, beauty appreciated, or talent go down, if she should chance to have the two latter as she grows up."

"Which she is pretty sure to have, unless she alter dreadfully," said De Vigne.

Boughton Tressillian sighed. "Yes, she is pretty enough, and she is clever. I have educated her entirely, and I believe she already knows much more than young ladies who have just 'finished.' She would learn even better still if she were not so wildly imaginative. Poverina! she is ill

fitted to grapple with the world. I never guessed but what her life would be one of affluence and luxury, or I would never have united her fortunes to mine. Whether I spend my few more years between four bare walls or not, matters little; but hers——. Well, De Vigne, what news to-day? Is the Liberal ministry going to keep in or not?"

De Vigne stayed some half hour chatting with him, telling him all the amusing on dits of the clubs, all the *pros* and *cons* of the new Reform Bill, and all the fresh political tittle-tattle of the morning, while Tressillian, after that single expression of regret for Alma, alluded no more to his own affairs, and discussed politics, literature, and all the current topics with the intelligence and interest of a man of intellect, entertaining us with the same cheerful ease as he had done at Weive Hurst, evidently meeting his reverses with a philosophy of the highest yet of the simplest order; and that true pride which knew that it was he himself, not his mere entourages or social position, which rendered him worthy to be sought and respected. De Vigne was more courtly, more delicate, more respectful to the ruined gentleman than he was to many a leader of high ton, for, haughty and imperious on occasion as he was, there was a touch of true chivalry in his character. Go down in the world, De Vigne stretched out his hand to you, be you what you might; rise high, and he cut you, or snubbed you, as he might see fit. De Vigne was not like the world, messieurs.

"How I should enjoy straightening my left arm for the benefit of that cursed hypocrite of the British Beggars' Bank," began De Vigne, tooling the tilbury back again through the Strand; and, so far forgetting himself in his irritation as to venture to use the whip to his wheeler, who revenged the insult by a *pas d'extase*, which produced the most frightful commotion among the omnibuses

full of City men, whose conductors swore in most inelegant language at "the confounded break-neck nob!" "The morality of the age is too ridiculous! On a poor banker's clerk, who, with a sick wife and starving children, yields to one of the fiercest temptations that can beset a man, and takes one drop out of the sea of gold around him, it crushes so severely, and seems to think penal servitude too kind a boon for him! To a lying pharisee, who has reduced forty thousand people, who trusted in his honor, to want or utter ruin, who has taken alike the poor curate's hard savings and the landed gentleman's large principal, the world is lenient, because he stuck his name on missionary lists, and came to public meetings with the Bible on his lips, and, after a little time has slipped away, men will see him installed in a Roman palace, or a Paris hotel, and will flock to his soirées by the dozens!"

"Of course; don't you think that if Mephistopheles set up here in Belgravia, and gave the best dinners in London, he would find lots of people to dine with him?"

"Sans doute. Men measure you by what you give them. If you're a poor devil with only small beer in your cellar, you are ostracized, though you be the best and wisest man in Athens; if you can give them claret, they will come and drink it with you, and only discuss your sins behind your back; and if by any chance you should have pipefuls of Johannisberg, and Tokay, and priceless Madeira, you will have all the cardinal virtues voted to you without your giving a single testimony to your even recognizing the cardinal virtues at all. The world is very fond of taking a scapegoat whom it flogs, as his governess flogged a peasant boy for the dauphin's sins; and that scapegoat they will, in their periodical fits of morality, as Macaulay has it, hunt down, and torture, and trample to death, with every inconceivable ingenuity. But, take my word for it,

that scapegoat is always some ruined man, or some boy-poet goaded on by cruelty or starvation, or some woman such as she to whom the founder of their creed was content to say, 'Go and sin no more;' never by any chance the sinner whose phylacterics are broad and horn exalted, and at whose groaning table they may still eat, and drink, and be merry. Hallo! gently, gently, Psyche! what a hard mouth she has. Confound her! she will set Cupid off again, and I shall figure in the police reports as taken up for furious driving. I say, what can Tressillian do?"

"Do?" I repeated.

"Yes. What can he do that I can find him? He is a gentleman and a scholar, but his age shuts him out from any post such as he could ever accept. He has no money—he must do something; indeed, it is his deepest wish. I must talk to Sabretasche; he has no end of interest everywhere if he would only exert it. I think he would if I asked him, so that we might get some pleasant gentleman-like sinecure for Tressillian, where he would not have much to remind him painfully of his reverses. I'll see. My family can get most things for asking, the distaff side at the least; there are no De Vignes on the face of the earth besides myself; one scapegrace is enough, I suppose. By the way, Chevasney, you'll try and get leave to come down with me on the 1st to Vigne. It's a horrid bore, but I can't get mine till the 31st. I wanted it a month earlier."

"To go to Brighton?" I knew the last week in July would see the Fantyre and Trefusis transplanted from Bruton Street to Kemp Town.

He laughed. "Well, Brighton's very pleasant in its season, and town is utterly detestable in August, when everybody not tied by the leg as we are is away yachting in the Levant, or fishing in Norway, or bagging black game on the moors. or doing something worth doing.

However, we must make up for it among the turnips and stubble. I think my preserves are the best in the country; but I never will have a battue. Cooping up tame pheasants, who come around you as if they were going to be fed, and calling it sport to shoot 'em off by the score at a yard or two's distance, is too ridiculous. A boy used to a pop-gun could do as much as that. You must come down, Arthur, I can't do without you; it's a crying cruelty to coop military men up in the shooting season; besides, you are a great pet of my mother's."

"Doesn't she ever come to town?"

"Oh, yes; but her health is delicate. She has no daughters to bring out, you know, and I think she prefers the country in the spring and summer. Here one loses summer altogether. We don't know such a word; it is merged into 'the season,' and the flowers seem to grow on ladies' bonnets instead of meadow land. Well! I like it best. I prefer society to solitude. St. Simon Stylites had very fine meditations, I dare say, and a magnificent bird's-eye view of the country, but I must say Aristippus's myrtle wreaths and Falernian would seem more like life to me, and I fancy I should see more of human nature in the Pré Catalan than the prairies."

"Yet you go mad after nature sometimes."

"Of course. There is a simplicity of grandeur about the wide stretch of sea in a sunny dawn, or the far sweep of gray hills and golden birch woods in a Highland moor, beside which the fret and flippery, the toil and turmoil of human life, shrink back rebuked into insignificance. No man who has any manhood left in him at all but feels the better for the fresh rush of mountain wind and the calm solitude of midnight stars. But for all that, I am neither poet nor philosopher enough to live with nature always, and forswear the coarser elements of life, lansquenet, rac-

ing, Coralies, champagne, and all one's other habitual agréments. Hang it, Arthur, why do you set me defining; can't you let me enjoy? When a man begins to define his love, it's a sign he's getting tired of it, and wants to reason himself back into it; and when he begins to define life, to divide it into animal and spiritual, and philosophize upon it, it is ten to one he's grown sick of the whole thing, or some way or other missed the right key to amusing himself in it. Ten years hence I will theorize on life as much as you please, just now I prefer taking it as it comes, passing the flavorless flowers, and sucking all the honey out of the roses and mignonette. There! we did the distance in no time. Remind me to speak to the messmen about that would-be '15 port. It is the most daring sloes-and-damsons that was ever palmed off on anybody. Thank Heaven nobody can deceive me in wine."

"Nor in anything else?"

"I hope not. If they can, I have not knocked about the world to much purpose."

If De Vigne set his mind on doing anything, whether it was taking a bullfinch or winning a woman, hooking a salmon or canvassing a county, he never rested till it was done; therefore, having taken Boughton Tressillian's cause steadily to heart, he set all the levers going that were available to find something suitable to the old man's broken fortunes and refined taste. With his head and heart full of the Trefusis, and his time more than filled up with his favorite pursuits and amusements, I thought it was very good of him to think to such useful purpose for a man who had known little of him since his boyhood, and to give so much time as he did to calling and soliciting and letter-writing in the old gentleman's cause. He never let Sabretasche alone till the Colonel, who knew everybody, from royal princes and cabinet ministers downward, used his

interest too, a thing Sabretasche detested doing, because, as he said, it "gives you so much trouble, and lays you under obligation, a debt nobody ever allows you to forget that you owe them." To please De Vigne, however, the Colonel exerted himself, and between them they procured a consulate for Tressillian at a large pleasant town on the Mediterranean shore, which had of late years become almost an English settlement, whose climate was exquisite, scenery perfect, combined with admirable English and Italian society, according to the elegant language of the guide-books, who told no lies about it for a wonder; guide-books, perhaps from a feeling of generosity, generally making it a point of honor to praise what nobody cares two straws for, and omit the one thing that is worth a journey to inspect, and about which you are certain to be beset with questions from everybody on your return home.

Anybody who wanted to see the side of De Vigne's character that made those who really knew him love him with the love of Jonathan for David, (a character as unknown to the generality of people as David's was to those who only judged him when his passions were up and he slew Uriah, and snatched away Bathsheba, and did many other naughty things,) should have seen him offering his consulship to Tressillian, with the most delicate tact and refinement of feeling, so that the ruined gentleman could feel no obligation that could touch his pride, and could receive it only as a thoughtful forestalling of his wishes. That Tressillian felt it deeply I could see, but De Vigne refused all thanks.

"What had he done?" he persisted. "Nothing at all. Asked his cousin for a thing, to which Ferrers was only enchanted to be able to appoint a gentleman of birth and classical education; if any was obliged it was Ferrers, and he himself was only delighted to be the first to offer to

Tressillian anything Tressillian would honor them all by accepting."

Tressillian shook his head; he felt the kindness all the deeper for De Vigne's disclaimer of it. "You are a noble fellow, De Vigne; you will find your reward some day."

"My dear sir," laughed De Vigne—when he felt things at all he generally turned them off in a jest—"I get many more rewards than I deserve, I fancy; my life's all prizes and no blanks, except now and then the blank of satiety. I am not one of those who 'do good and blush to find it known,' for these simple reasons, that I never do any good at all, and have not blushed since I was seven and fell in love with my mother's lady's-maid, a most divine French-woman, with gold ear-rings, who eventually took up with the butler—bad taste, after me, was it not? You won't desert me for anybody I hope, Alma? You will see sublime Italians at Lorave?"

"They will not be as handsome as you are, Sir Folko," responded Miss Tressillian, with frank admiration.

"Thank you, cher enfant; you will teach me to blush if you flatter me so much. Will you take me in, Alma, if I and my yacht call upon you any time?"

"Oh, do! do!" cried Alma, vehemently, "and take me on the sea, and I will show you the mermaids under the waves, with their necklets of sea-shells and their fans of pink weed. You will see them, indeed you will, if you will only believe in them."

"Most apt illustration of faith," laughed De Vigne. "People see tables turn, and violins dance with broomsticks, and hear Shakspeare talk through a loo-table, by sheer force of believing in them. When will that child ever learn to come down to the coarse realities of actual every-day existence?"

"No," said Tressillian, "I am afraid I have hardly taken

the best way of educating her for the real world. She should have gone to school, to learn the sober practicalities, and business tendencies, and methodical views of English schoolgirls. Her solitary life, with books and flowers, has encouraged the enthusiasm, imagination, and demonstrativeness, that come, I suppose, with her foreign blood; but then, I always thought she would be raised above heeding or considering the world, much more above ever working in it. Now that I shall not have the time to devote to her, I must find some one who will."

A few days afterward, Tressillian, with his granddaughter and an English governess he had engaged for her, set off for Lorave. De Vigne and I saw them off at the South-Eastern station, and little Alma cried as bitterly at parting with De Vigne as almost any woman who loved him could have done, only the tears were not got up for effect, and washed off no rouge, as most of theirs would have done. De Vigne kissed her—she was pretty enough to win such condescension; it took something *very* pretty to tempt De Vigne; he was too great an angler to count all fish that came in his net—consoled her with the promise of a yachting trip to Lorave, and came away from the station to drive the Trefusis down to dinner at the Star and Garter, where he was going to give an entertainment of unusual extravagance and splendor even for that dashing hotel, of which Constance Trefusis was undisputed regina, and looked it too, drinking Badminton with much the same air as Juno must have worn drinking ambrosia, and outshining all the women in beauty, and figure, and toilette, for which last the women of course hated her, and respected her *à la fois*; for, cordially as a lady detests a handsome sister, it is notable that she no less despises a plain or ugly one. To be handsome a woman thinks an unpardonable crime in her rival, and to be plain is a most contemptible *faux pas*.

I can see De Vigne now, sitting at the head of the table, that bright June evening, at Richmond. How happy he looked! his broad, white forehead slightly flushed with pleasure and triumph, his dark eagle eyes flashing fire, or beaming softness and tenderness on the Trefusis, his firm lips curved into a joyous smile, his musical and singularly clear-toned voice ringing with a careless, happy harmony. Dear old fellow! Life's best gifts seemed to lurk for him in that goblet of champagne he lifted to his lips, with a fond pledge (by the eyes) to Constance. Yet, if he had known, he would have filled the glass with hemlock rather than have coupled the champagne cup with *her* name. Ah, well! he is not the only man for whom the name that rang so sweetly, breathed in the toast of love, has chimed a bitter death-knell through all his after-life.

The Trefusis did her best to lure him into a proposal that night, with her black eyes and brilliant smiles, as he sat by her at dinner, and leaned out of the window afterward beside her, the delicate perfume of her hair mingling with the fragrance of lilies, and roses, and heliotropes from the garden below, the low jug-jug of the nightingale joining with their own low voices, and the voluptuous summer starlight gleaming on both their faces—his, impassioned, eager, earnest; hers, triumphant, exquisitely handsome, but the beauty of the rock-crystal which will melt neither for wintry frost nor tropic sunshine. She did her best, and the hour and the scene alike favored her. She bent forward, she looked up in his face, and the moon's rays gave to her eyes a liquid sweetness never their own. The nightingale sang softly of love under the dark laurustinus-boughs; the flowers sent up their more luxurious fragrance with the rich evening dew. De Vigne began to lose control over himself; the passion within him took the reins; he who all his life through had denied himself nothing,

neither knew nor cared how to check it. He bent toward the Trefusis, his fiery pulse beating loud; his moustaches touched her low smooth brow: Heaven knows what he might have said, but I went up to them, ruthlessly:

“De Vigne, the horses are put to, and Miss Trefusis wants to be in town by eleven, in time for Mrs. Delany’s ball: everybody’s gone, or going.”

A fierce oath was muttered under De Vigne’s moustaches—he can be fiery enough if he’s crossed. The Trefusis gave me a look—well! such as you, madame, will never give a man if you are prudent, even though he be your lover’s fidus Achates, and comes in just when he is not wanted. Then she rose, drawing on her gloves with a sweet, courteous smile:

“Oh! thank you, Mr. Chevasney; how kind of you to come and tell us. I would not be late at dear Mrs. Delany’s for the world, you know: she is a very pet friend of mine ”

I had saved him that time, and, idiot-like, triumphed at my success. Might I not have known that no forty-horse power can keep a man from committing himself if he is bent upon it? and might I not have known that if a fellow enters himself for a steeple-chase with a woman, she will have cantered in and carried off the cup before he has saved half the distance, let him pride himself upon his jockeyship never so highly?

I had saved De Vigne, and I don’t think he bore me any good-will for it, for after he had bestowed the Trefusis in the Fantyre brougham, he took his havana and drove me and a couple of other men back in his phaeton to Kensington in gloomy and grandiose silence. He could not go to Mrs. Delany’s, for the best of all reasons, that he was not asked. Ladies never *do* invite with their pet friends the quarry their pet friends are trying the hardest to lure;

not from envy, pretty little dears! who would think of accusing them of *that*? Do they ever, by any chance, break the Tenth Commandment, and covet their neighbor's carriage, horses, or appointments, diamonds, point, flirtations, or anything that she has?

The day after the Trefusis went down to Brighton, to drive the Dragoons distracted, who would see her cantering over the South Downs with some stray acquaintance, who lent her one of his horses, and in return lost his heart to those imperious black eyes; or waltz with her at one of their own balls, to drink in intoxication with the clang of The Express; or meet her on the Esplanade, that magnificent face enhanced by her little cobweb lace veil, swaying them all with her grand beauty, as if her little carved ivory parasol handle had been a scepter as potent as Venus's ceinture.

De Vigne stayed in town, and let her go, thank Heaven! without putting his love, and name, and honor into Constance Trefusis's hands.

PART THE FIFTH.

I.

HOW DE VIGNE COURTS IRON GYVES, AS THOUGH THEY
WERE SOFTEST ROSE CHAINS.

DE VIGNE and I consumed not a little cognac and Caven-dish, swearing over our durance vile, when everybody, except unlucky dogs of militaires, had departed, and town was empty; shutters up in all the windows where we had wont to see delicate hot-house flowers, and as beautiful English faces; not a wiggy coachman nor a showy hack in

Ring or Ride; not a lounge by the rails, nor a note of the Life Guards band; the club-rooms empty, newsless, and dreary, great markets of gossip without either scandal-mongers or hearers, a forlorn wight or two sitting in them with the papers all to himself, but far from enjoying the monopoly—everything shut up, everything at a stand-still, even Paterfamilias of Russell Square and Bloomsbury had taken himself off to eat shrimps and admire the “hocean” at Margate; even Brown, Jones, and Robinson had got their fortnight from Coutts’s or Barclay’s, and were gone to shoot sparrows with their country cousins, or to Boulogne, under the impression that they should have “done France;” all the sang pur was gone, and a good deal of the canaille, and we were left in London, I thirsting to be stalking royals with Sabretasche up in his Inverness-shire moor, and De Vigne longing to be after a finer covey still. So, after six weeks’ consummation of anathemas, soda water, and Latakia, sufficient to last a troop for a twelve-month, he and I were delighted enough when we were at last swinging down in the express to Vigne on the 31st of August. I wondered in my mind he was not off to Kemp Town, but I was too glad to find the partridges outbalanced the Trefusis to make any comment upon it. Vigne was about sixty miles from London, and we were at the station in a couple of hours or so, where a drag waited for us with four blood bays, whose grooms glowed with repressed delight at sight of their master. De Vigne, though of somewhat imperious temper, and immeasurably haughty to people of pretentious rank, was cordially liked by his dependents; and I have always noticed that servants always like best those who, while they treat them well, never let them forget their difference of degree. Vigne was a pretty picturesque village, and nearly every rood of land belonged to him; and his park was almost as magnificent a sweep

of land as Holcombe or Longleat. The De Vignes of Vigne went far back in English annals, farther than any in the peerage; and De Vigne would have no more accepted a title than a partnership in a brewery. He looked back on a pure ancestry—ambassadors, scholars, soldiers, chancellors, ministers, gentlemen always; and many a tale of daring and danger, many a record of high honor and chivalric deeds, were told to him as a child of those courtly men in hauberk and corslet, in velvet and point, with their stern brows, and their perfumed love-locks, and their powdered wigs—men who had wooed and won in courts and camps, and made their names famous either through pen or sword.

It was with something warmer than pride that he looked across over his wide woodlands glowing in the August sunset, the great elm-trees throwing their wide cool shadows far over the rich pasture land beneath; the ferns, from the tiny feathery sprays up to the giant leaves, high as a man's elbow, waving in the fresh breezes, the deer troop-ing away into the deep green glades and the lengthened avenues, stretching off in aisles of burnished green and gold, like one of Creswick's rich English landscapes of checkered light and shadow. A mile and a half of one of those magnificent elm avenues brought us to the house, more like Hardwick Hall in exterior than any other place I know. It stood grandly, too, something as Hardwick does; but in interior, though the hall and other parts of it were medieval enough, it was what Hardwick certainly is not—or was not, when last I saw it—luxurious and modern to the last degree, with every elegance and comfort that upholstery and science have taught the nineteenth century to look upon as absolute requirements.

De Vigne threw the ribbons to a groom, and sprang down, while the deep bay of the dogs in the kennels some way off gave him a welcome to his taste. In the hall he

had another: his mother, Lady Flora, a soft, delicate woman, with eyes and voice of great beauty and sweetness, came out from a morning room to meet him, with both her hands outstretched, and a fond smile on her face. De Vigne loved his mother tenderly and reverentially. She had been a wise woman with him: as a child, she stimulated his energies instead of repressing them, and, with strong self-command, let him risk a broken limb rather than teach him his first idea of fear, a thing of which De Vigne was as profoundly ignorant as little Nelson. As a boy, she entered into all his sports and amusements, listening to his tales of rounders, ponies, cricket, and boating, as if she really understood them. As a man, she never attempted to interfere with him. She knew that she had trained him in honor and truth, and was too skilled in human nature to seek to pry into a young man's life. The consequence was, that she kept all her son's affection, trust, and confidence, and, when she did speak, was always heard gently and respectfully; and he would often tell her as naturally of his errors and entanglements as he had, when a child, told her of his faults to his servant or his Shetland. The house was full, chiefly of men come down for the shooting, with one or two girls of the Ferrers family, Lady Flora's nieces, who would have liked very well to have caught their cousin Granville, for their father, though he was a Marquis, was as poor for a peer as a curate with six daughters and no chance of preferment. But their cousin Granville was not to be caught—by their trolling, at least.

"I am delighted to see you, Mr. Chevasney," said Lady Flora, when I went down to the drawing-room after ablution and hot coffee. "You know you are always a favorite of mine, at first, *ne vous en déplaie*, because you were a friend of Granville's, and then for your own sake. There

will be some people here to-morrow to amuse you, not but what you gentlemen never seem to me so happy as when you are without us. Shut you up in your smoking, or billiard, or card room, and you want nothing more!"

"True enough!" laughed De Vigne. "It is an ungallant admission, but it is a fact, nevertheless. See men at college wines, in the jollity and merriment of a camp, in the sans gêne enjoyment of a man dinner! Deny it who will, we *can* be happy without the beau sexe, but the beau sexe cannot be happy without us!"

"How concerted you are, Granville!" cried Adelina Ferrers, a handsome blonde, who thought very well of herself. "I am quite sure we can."

"Can you, Lina?" said De Vigne, leaning against the mantle-piece, and watching his mother's diamond rings flash in and out as she did some bead-work. "Why do we never hear of ladies parties, then? Why, when we come in after dinner, do we invariably find you all bored to the last extent, and half asleep, till you revive under our kindly influence? Why, if you are as happy without us, do we never see you establish women clubs to drink tea, or eau de Cologne, or sal volatile, and read new novels and talk over dress?"

"Because we are too kind. Our society improves you so much, that, through principle, we do not deprive you of it," answered Lady Lina, with a long glance of her large turquoise eyes.

"That's a pity, dear," smiled De Vigne, "because, if we thought you were comfortably employed, we could go off to the partridges to-morrow with much greater pleasure; whereas, to know, as we do, that you will all be victims of ennui till we come back again, naturally spoils sport to men like myself, of tender conscience and amiable disposition. You have 'The Princess' now in your hand, Lina;

that will tell you how ladies who fancied they could be happy without us came to grief!"

"This is the fruit of Miss Trefusis's flattery, I suppose," sneered Blanche Ferrers, the other cousin, who could not appreciate fun, and who had made hard running after De Vigne a season ago.

"Miss Trefusis never flatters," said De Vigne, quietly.

"Indeed!" said Blanche. "I know nothing of her. I do not desire!"

The volumes expressed in those four last words were such as only women like Blanche Ferrers could possibly compress in one little sneering sentence. De Vigne felt all that was intended in it: his eyebrows contracted, his eyes flashed fire; he had too knightly a heart not to defend an absent woman, and a woman he loved, as dearly as he would his own honor.

"It would be to your advantage, Blanche, if you had that pleasure. Miss Trefusis would make any one proud to know her; *even* the Ladies Ferrers, though the world does say they are fond of imagining the sun created solely that it may have the honor of shining on them."

He spoke very quietly, but sarcastically. His mother looked up at him hastily, then bent over her work; Blanche colored with annoyance, and smiled another sneer.

"Positively, Granville, you are quite chivalrous in her defense. I know it is the law at Vigne for nobody to disagree with you; nevertheless, I shall venture, for I must assure you that, far from esteeming it an honor to know Miss Trefusis, I should deem it rather a—*dishonor*!"

How like a lion fairly roused and longing to spring he looked. He kept cool, however, but his teeth were set hard.

"Lady Blanche, it is rather dishonor to yourself to dare to speak in that manner of a lady of whom you have never

heard any evil, and who is *my* friend. Miss Trefusis is as worthy respect and admiration as yourself, and she shall never be mentioned in any other terms in my presence."

How gallant he looked, with his steady eyes looking sternly down at her, and his firm mouth set into iron. A whole history of love and trust, honor and confidence, the chivalry that defended the absent, the strength that protected the woman dear to him, were written on his face. By Heaven! to think it should all be wasted upon *her*!

Blanche laughed a derisive laugh, but a little timidly, though; it was not easy even for her to be rude to him.

"Respect and admiration! Really, Granville, one would believe report, and imagine you intended to give Lady Fantyre's—what?—niece, dependent, companion—which is it?—your name."

"Perhaps I do. As it is, I exact the same courtesy for her, as my friend, that I shall do if ever she be—my wife!"

He spoke slowly and calmly, still leaning on the mantle-piece; but his face was white with passion, and his dark eyes glowed like fire. What a dead silence followed his words: the silence of breathless astonishment, of unutterable dismay. Lady Flora turned as white as her beadwork, and she did not trust herself to look at her son. In a moment or two she spoke, with the same gentle dignity she always had.

"Blanche, you forget what you are saying. You can have no possible right to question your cousin's actions or opinions. Let this be the last I hear of such a discussion. Mr. Chevasney, if you wish to be useful, will you be kind enough to hold this skein of floss silk for me?"

Just at that moment some of the men came in and surrounded Adelina and Blanche; it was a relief to everybody. Lady Flora went on winding her silk, not daring

to look up at her son. He stayed where he was, leaning on the mantle-piece, playing with a setter's ears, till dinner was announced as served; then he gave his arm to the Marchioness, and was especially brilliant and agreeable all the evening.

That night, however, when most of us had gone off to our dormitories to dream of the joys of stubble and turnip-field, De Vigne rapped at the door of his mother's dressing-room. She expected it, and admitted him at once. He sat by the fire some moments, holding her hand in his own. De Vigne was very gentle with what he loved. His mother looked up at him, with a very few words: "Dearest, is it true?" "Yes." Where he meant much, he also generally said few words.

His mother was silent. Perhaps, until now, she had never realized how entirely she would lose her son to his wife; how entirely the new passion would sweep away and replace the old affection; how wholly, and how justly, his confidences, his ambitions, his griefs, his joys, would go to another instead of to herself; perhaps she knew how entirely unfit De Vigne was to be curbed and tied, how much his fiery nature would shrink from the burden of married life, and his fiery heart refuse to give the love exacted as a right; perhaps she knew, by knowledge of human nature, and experience of human life, how true it is that "a young man married is a man that's marred."

"Your wife!" she said, at last, thick tears in her voice and in her eyes. "Granville, you little guess how those words sound to me; how much I have hoped, how much I have feared, how much I have prayed for in—your wife. Forgive me, dear; I can hardly accustom myself to it yet."

She bent her head, and sobbed bitterly. May we believe, with Madame de Girardin—

C'est en vain que l'on nomme erreur,
Cette secrète intelligence,
Qui portant la lumière au fond,
Sur des maux ignorés nous fait gémir d'avance?

De Vigne bent his head, and kissed her. It was very rarely he saw his mother's tears; in proportion to their rarity they always touched him. They were both of them silent. The next question she asked came with the resignation of a woman to a man whose purpose she knows she can never alter, nor even sway, any more than she can stir the elm-trees in the avenues from the beds that they have lain in for such lengthened centuries.

"You really love her then?"

"More passionately than I have ever loved a woman yet."

That sealed the sentence. Lady Flora knew that never in love or in sport had De Vigne checked his fancy or turned back from his quarry.

"God help you then!"

He started at the uncalled-for prayer. It was an involuntary utterance of the deep tenderness, the undefined dread with which she regarded his future. He smiled down at her. "Why, mother, what is there so dreadful in love? One would fancy you thought shockingly of your sex, to view my first thought of marriage through smoked glasses."

She tried to smile. "It is such a lottery."

"Of course it is; but so are all games of chance; and, if one ventures nothing, one may go without play all one's life. As for happiness, *that* is at very uncertain odds at all times, and the only wise thing one can do is to enjoy the present, and let the future go hang. Does not La Bruyère tell us that no man ever married yet, who did not in twelve months' time wish he had never seen his wife?

It is true enough for that matter; so that, whether one does it sooner or later, one is equally certain to repent." He spoke with a light laugh and a fearless confidence in his own future which went to his mother's heart. She took both his hands in hers.

"Granville, you know I never seek to interfere with your opinions, plans, or actions. You are a man of the world, far fitter to judge for yourself than I am to judge for you; but no one can love you better than I."

"Indeed no," said De Vigne, tenderly, "none so well."

"And no one cares for your future life as I. Therefore, will you listen to me for a minute?"

"Sixty, if you like."

"Then," said his mother gently, "do you really think yourself that you are fitted for married life, or married life fitted for you?"

"Don't put it in that way," said De Vigne, impatiently. "Married life? No, not if I were chained down into dull domesticity; but in our position marriage makes little or no difference. We keep the same society, have the same *divertissements*. We are not chained together like two galley-slaves, toiling away at one oar, without change of scene or of companion. Constance Trefusis must be my wife, because, if she is not, I shall go mad; but she is not a woman only fit 'to suckle fools and chronicle small beer,' and she would be the last to deprive me of that liberty of which you are quite right in thinking I should chafe incessantly at the loss. But I am talking myself, not listening to you. What else were you going to say?"

"I was going to say—are you sure you will never love again?"

De Vigne grew impatient again. He threw back his head; these were not pleasant suggestions to him.

"Really, my dear mother, you are looking very far into

futurity. How can I, or any other man, by any possibility, answer such a question? We are not gods, to foresee what lies before us. I know that I love now—love more deeply than I have ever done yet, and that is enough for me!”

“That is not enough for me,” answered his mother, with a heavy sigh. “I can foresee your future, for I know your nature, your mind, your heart. You will marry now, in the mad passion of the hour; marry as a thousand men do, giving up their birthright of free choice, and liberty, and an open future, for a mess of porridge of a few months’ delight. I know nothing of Miss Trefusis, nor do I wish to say anything against her; but I know *you*. You marry her, no doubt, from eye-love; for her magnificent beauty, which report says is unrivaled. After a time that beauty will grow stale and tame to you; it will not be your fault; men are born inconstant, and eye-love expires when the eye has dwelt long enough on it to grow tired and satiated. Have you not, times out of number, admired and wearied before, Granville? Then there will come long years of regret, impatience of the fetters once joyfully assumed; perhaps—for you require sympathy and comprehension—miserable years of wrangling and reproaches, such as you are least fitted of all men to endure. You will see that your earlier judgment was crude, your younger taste at fault; *then*, with your passions strengthened, your discernment matured, you will love again—love with all the tenderness, the vehemence, the power of later years—love, to find the crowning sorrow of your life, or to drag another in to share the curse you already have brought upon yourself. Can you look steadily at such a future?”

A chill of ice passed through his veins as he heard her; then he threw the presentiment off, and his hot blood

flowed on again in its willful and fiery course; he answered her passionately and decidedly.

"Yes. I have no fear of any evil coming to me through my love. If she will, she shall be my wife, and whatever my future be I accept it."

The day after I found the reason for De Vigne's throwing over Brighton for his own home. The Trefusis and Lady Fantyre came down to stay at Follet, a place some three or four miles from Vigne, with some friends of the Fantyre's, whose acquaintance she had made on the Continent, people whom De Vigne knew but slightly, but whom he now cultivated more than he generally troubled himself to do much more exclusive members of that invariably proud, stuck-up, and pitiaibly-toadied thing, the county.

The first of September came, gray, soft, still, as that delightful epoch of one's existence always should, and up with the dawn we swallowed beer and coffee, devils and omelettes, and all the agréments of breakfast too hastily to half appreciate them, and went out, a large party; for Sabretasche had come there the night before, and several other men too, to knock the birds over in De Vigne's princely preserves. What magic is there in sport to make us so mad after it? What is the charm that lies hid in the whirr of the covey up from the stubble, and the clear sharp ring of the Purdey, that makes dandies of Pall Mall never so happy as when wading through plowed fields in sloppy weather, and fastidious exclusives warm with boyish verve, carrying their gun through dripping turnips, knee-deep in mud, or dead beat but triumphant with the knowledge of twenty brace in the bag on the pony's back? A strange charm there is—a charm we enjoy too much to analyze it; and De Vigne, whose head and heart were full of different game, and Sabretasche, who hated dirtying his hands, and shrank from most people and most things as too coarse for

his artistic taste, alike enjoyed it with the dogs and the beaters round them in the wide open fields, or lying in the shade of some great hedge-trees, discussing Bass and a hot luncheon with more appetite than they ever had for the most delicious bouquet of claret or the daintiest hors d'œuvre at Tortini's.

A splendid day's sport we had; and though De Vigne did not allow a battue on his lands, I think we had almost as many head of game in the bags as if we had had one, when twilight had put an end to the ever-glorious and ever-longingly-anticipated First, and we had returned to our cozy rooms in the bachelor's wing to dress for dinner. Coming out of mine I met De Vigne, looking not one bit more tired than if he had been lying all day on a sofa in the drawing-room, dressed with the quiet taste that characterized him. De Vigne detested Brummelism or fopism of any species, yet I bet you he looked as thorough-bred with his plain, delicate linen, and his little ribbon tie, as his ancestors used in velvet and cloth of gold, steinkirks of point and shoe-buckles of diamonds. He put his hand on my shoulder with his old kind smile.

"Well, Arthur, hadn't we good sport to-day? I say, send off any of that game you like anywhere; you know lots of people, I dare say. Isn't it beautiful to see Sabretasche knock down the birds, for such a lazy fellow as he is, too?"

"He doesn't shoot better than you."

"Don't you think so? But then he's a disciple of the dolce, and I always go hard at anything I take in hand, not but what I am idle enough, in all conscience, sometimes."

"You don't sell your game?" I asked, knowing I might just as well ask him if he sold hot potatoes.

"Sell it? No, thank you. I am not a poulterer. I

have sport, not trade; and the men who sell the game their friends help them to kill should write up over their lodge-gates, 'Game sold here by men who would like to be thought gentlemen, but find it a losing concern.' I would as soon send my trees up to London for building purposes as my partridges to Leadenhall. The fellows who do that must have some leaven of old Lombards, or Chepe goldsmiths in them; and though they have an escutcheon instead of a sign now, can't get rid of the trader's instinct."

I loved to set De Vigne up on his aristocratic stilts, they were so deliciously contradictory to the radical opinions he was so fond of enunciating occasionally. The fact was, he was an aristocrat at his heart, a radical by his head, and the two sometimes had a tilt and upset one another.

"Is anybody coming to dinner to-day?" I was half afraid somebody was whom I detested to see near him at all.

"Yes," he answered, curtly. "There are the Levisons, Lady Fantyre and Miss Trefusis, Jack Cavendish, and Ashton of Boxwood."

For my life I couldn't help a long whistle, I was so savage at that woman getting the better of us all so cleverly.

"The deuce! De Vigne, your mother and that nasty, gambling, story-telling old Fantyre will hardly run in couples."

For a second his cheek flushed.

"It is *my* house, I invite whom I see fit. As for my mother, God bless her! she will hardly ever find a woman good or true enough to run in couples with her. She is *too* good and true to be prudish or censorious. I have always noticed that it is women who live in glass houses who learn quickest to throw stones, I suppose in the futile hope of inducing people to imagine that their

dwelling are of spotless stone, such as nobody could possibly assail."

"Why the devil, De Vigne," said I, "are you so mad about that woman? What is it you admire in her?"

He answered with the reckless passion that was day by day getting more mastery over him.

"How should I define? I admire nothing—I admire everything. I only know that I will move heaven and earth to win her, and that I would shoot any man dead who ventured to dispute her with me!"

"Is she worth all that?"

His eyes grew cold and annoyed; I had gone a step too far. He took his hand off my shoulder, and saying, with that icy hauteur which no man could assume so chillingly as himself, "My dear Chevasney, you may apply the lesson I gave Lady Blanche yesterday, to yourself; I never allow, either to me or of me, any remarks on my personal concerns," passed down before me into the hall, where, just alighted from the Levisons' carriage, her cerise-hued cloak dropped off one shoulder, something shining and jeweled wreathed over her hair, the strong wax-lights gleaming on her face, with its rich geranium-hue in the cheek, and its large, black, luminous eye, and its short, curved, upper lip, stood in relief against the carved oak, dark armor, and deep-hued windows of the hall—the Trefusis.

How grandly De Vigne went down the wide oak staircase and across the tessellated pavement to her side, to welcome her to Vigne—how tenderly he bent toward her—how passionately he looked down into her upraised face, and she—she thought, I dare say, as she glanced round, that it would be a conquest worth making: the master and—the home.

Lady Flora looked earnestly at Constance as she entered. It was the first time she had seen her, for the Trefusis was

out driving when, by her son's request, she called on the Levisons, with whom she had not more acquaintance than an occasional dinner or recontre at some county gathering.

Splendid as Constance looked—and that she was magnificent her worst enemies could never deny—in that hard though superb profile, in those lips curved downward though of such voluptuous beauty, in those eyes so relentless and defiant though of such perfect hue and shape, his mother found how little to hope, how much to fear!

Yet the Trefusis played her cards well. She was very gentle, very sweet, to Lady Flora. She did not seem to seek De Vigne, nor to try and monopolize him; and with the Ladies Ferrers she was so calm, so self-possessed, and yet had so little assumption, that, hard as Lina and Blanche were studying to pick her to pieces, they could not find where to begin, till she drew off her glove at dinner, when Blanche whispered to Sabretasche, who had taken her in, “No sang pur *there*, but plenty of almond paste;” to which the Colonel, hating the Trefusis, but liking De Vigne too well to give the Ferrers a handle against their possible future cousin, replied, “Well, Lady Blanche, perhaps so—but one is so sated with pretty hands and empty heads, that one is almost grateful for a change.”

Whereat Blanche, all her governesses, Paris schools, and finishing not having succeeded in drilling much understanding into her brain, was bitterly wrathful, and, en conséquence, smiled extra pleasantly.

The Trefusis acted her part admirably that night, and people less skilled in society and physiognomy than Lady Flora would have been blinded by it.

“What a master spirit of intrigue is that woman!” said Sabretasche to me, as he watched De Vigne leaning over Constance's chair, while the Ferrers sang bravuras that excruciated the Colonel's fastidious aural senses. “Yet

she is not a talented woman by any means. But no man—certainly no man in love with her—can stand against the strong will and skillful artifices of an ambitious and designing intrigante. Solomon tells you, you know, Arthur, that the worst enemy you young fellows have is woman, and I tell you the same.”

“Yet, if report speaks truly, the sex has no warmer votary than you?”

“Whenever *did* report speak truly? Perhaps I may be only revenging myself; how should you know? It is the fashion, I know, to look on Pamela as a fallen star, and on Lovelace as a horrid cruel wretch. I don’t see it always so myself. Stars that are dragged from heaven by the very material magnets of guineas, cashmeres, love of dress, avarice, or ambition for a St. John’s-wood villa, are not deeply to be pitied; and men who buy toys at such low prices are not utterly to be censured for not estimating their goods very high. The price of a virtuous woman is not often above rubies; it has this difference, that the rubies set as a bracelet will suffice for Coralie, while they must go round a coronet to win Lady Blanche. Apropos of Blanche, whatever other silly things you do, Chevasney, never make an early marriage.”

“I never intend, I assure you,” I said, tartly. I thought he might have heard of Gwendolina, and be poking fun at me; and Gwen, I knew, was not for me, but for M. le Duc de Vieillecour, a poor, wiry, effete old beau, who had been about Charles X.

“Very well, so far; but you need not look so indignant; no man can tell into what he may be drawn. No one is so secure but what next year he may have committed the sin or the folly he utterly condemns or ridicules now. Look at De Vigne; six months past he would have laughed in your face if you had spoken to him of marriage.

Now he would be tempted to knock you down if you attempted to dissuade him from marriage. What will he gain by it? What will he not lose? If she were a nice girl, he would lose his liberty, his pleasant *vie de garçon*, his power of disposing of himself how and where he list, and of doing what he chose, without query or comment. With a woman like the Trefusis he will lose still more; he will lose his peace, his self-respect, his belief in human nature, and it will be well if he lose not his honor. He will have always beside him one from whom his better taste revolts, but to whom his hot-headed youth has fettered him, till one or the other lies in the grave. There is no knowing to what madness or what misery his early marriage may not lead him, to what depths of hopelessness or error the iron fetters of the Church and law may not drag him. Were he a weak man, he would collapse under her strong rein, and be henpecked, cheated, and cajoled; being a strong-willed one, he will rebel, and, still acting and seeing for himself, will find out in too short a time that he has sacrificed himself, and life, and name, to—a mistake!"

He spoke very earnestly for listless, careless, nonchalant, indolent Sabretasche, and his eyes grew inexpressibly melancholy with the utterance of his prophecy. I stared at him, for he was almost proverbially impassive; he caught my eye, and laughed.

"What do you think of my sermon, Arthur? Bear it in mind if you are in danger, that is all. When will those girls have finished those interminable songs? What a cruelty it is to society at large to have Scapper and Garcia teach women to sing whether they happen to have a note in their voice or not! Will you come out into the card-room, and have a game or two at *écarté*? You play wonderfully well for one so young as you are, but then you say a Frenchman taught you. I hate to play with a man

who cannot beat me tolerably often; there is no excitement without difficulty. The Trefusis knows that. Look at her flirting with Monckton in her stately style, while De Vigne stands by, looks superbly indifferent, and chafes all the time like a hound held in leash while another dog is pulling down the stag!"

"She will not make you happy, Granville!" said his mother that night, when he bid her good night in her dressing-room, as was his invariable custom.

He answered her stiffly. "It is unfortunate you are all so prejudiced against her."

"I am not prejudiced," she answered, with a bitter sigh. "Heaven knows how willingly I would try to love anything that loves you, but a woman's intuition sees farther sometimes than a man's discernment can penetrate, and in Miss Trefusis, beyond beauty of form and feature, I see nothing that will satisfy you, Granville; there is no beauty of mind, no beauty of heart! The impression she gives me is, that she is an able schemer, a clever actress, able to seize on the weak points of those around her and turn them to her own advantage, but that she is illiterate, ambitious, and heartless!"

"You wrong her and you wrong yourself!" broke in De Vigne, passionately. "Your anxiety for me warps alike your justice to her and your own penetration and charity of feeling. I should have thought you above such injustice and pettinesses."

"I only wish I may do her injustice," answered his mother, gravely. "But oh, Granville, I fear—I fear! Dearest, do not be angry, none will ever love you more unselfishly than I! If I tremble for your future, it is only that I know your character so well. I know all that, as years go on, your mind will require, your heart exact, from the woman who is your wife. I know how quickly

the glamour fades in the test of constant intercourse; I know that your wife will need to have wit, talent, fascination, in a very uncommon degree to keep you faithful to her; she will need to give you unusually passionate and lavish affection to chain your wayward heart. A commonplace, domestic woman would drive you from her side to another's; a hard, tyrannous, beautiful woman will freeze you into ice, like herself. I, who love you so dearly, how can I look calmly on to see the shipwreck of your life? My darling! my darling! I would almost as soon hear that you had died on a battle-field, as your father did before you, as hear that you had given your fate into that woman's hands!"

His mother's tenderness and grief touched De Vigne deeply; he knew how well she loved him, and that this was the first time she had sought to cross his will, but he stooped and kissed her, with fond words, and rose—of the same persuasion still. It were as easy to turn the west wind from its course, as it sweeps wild and free over the sea and land, as by words or counsel, laws or warnings, to attempt to stem the self-willed, headlong current of a man's strong love.

Had any whispered warning to Acis of his fate, would he have ever listened or cared when, in the golden sunset glow, he saw the witching gleam of Galatea's golden hair? When the son of Myrha gazed up into the divine eyes, and felt his own lips glow at the touch of "lava kisses," could he ever foresee, or, had he foreseen, would he have ever heeded the dark hour when he should lie dying on those same Idalian shores?

The Trefusis played her cards ably. A few days after she played her ace of trumps, and her opponents were obliged to throw up their hands. De Vigne did not ask his mother to invite her and Lady Fantyre there, infatuated

though he was, and wisely careless on such subjects generally, I think he felt that the old *ci-devant* orange-girl, with her nasty stories, her dingy reputation, and her clever tricks with the four honors, was not a guest suitable to his high-born, high-bred mother, so thorough a lady in tone and manner, voice and mind. But a day or two after was De Vigne's twenty-sixth birthday, a day that—contrary to his own taste, but in accordance with old habit, from the time when butts of beer brewed at his birth and pipes of comet wine laid down by his grandfather, had flowed for his tenantry and guests on his majority—had been celebrated, whether he was present or not, with wonderful *éclat* and magnificence. This year, as usual, "the county," and parts of surrounding counties, too, came to a dinner and ball at Vigne; the Levisons had been included in the invitations a month before we went down, and now, of course, the Trefusis would accompany them.

As De Vigne had not even the slight admixture of Roger De Coverley benevolence and Squire Western rough patriarchality assumed by some county men at the present time, as he had not the slightest taste for oats or barley, did not care two straws how his farms went or how his lands were let, and hated toadying and flummery as cordially as he hated bad wine, the proceedings of the day very naturally bored him immensely, and he threw himself down, after replying to his tenants' speeches, in one of the delicious couches of the smoking-room, with an anathema on the whole thing.

"What a happy fellow you are, Sabretasche," said he to the Colonel, who had retired from the scene on to one of the sofas, with a pile of periodicals and a case of exquisite Manillas. "You have nothing on your hands but your town-house, that you can shut up, and your Highland lodge, where you can leave your dogs and servants for

ten months in the year, and have no yeomanry tenants and servants to look to you yearly for sirloins and October, and a speech that is more trouble to make than fifty parliamentary ones."

"Yes, my dear fellow," said Sabretasche, "I did stay in that tent pitying you beyond measure, till my feelings and my olfactory and aural nerves couldn't stand seeing you martyred, and scenting that very excellent beef, and hearing those very edifying cheers any longer; so, as I couldn't help *you*, I took compassion on myself, shut myself up with the magazines, and thanked Heaven I was not born to that desideratum--'a fine landed property!'"

De Vigne laughed.

"Well, it's over now. I shouldn't mind it so much if they wouldn't talk such bosh to one's face--praising me for my liberality and noble-mindedness, and calling me public-spirited and generous, and Heaven knows what. They're a good-hearted set of fellows, though, I believe."

"Possibly," said Sabretasche; "but what extent of good-heartedness can make up for those dreadfully broad o's and a's, and those terrific 'Sunday-going suits,' and those stubble-like heads of hair plastered down with oil bought at a chemist's?"

"Not to you, you confounded refiner of refined gold," laughed De Vigne. "By-the-by, Sabretasche, don't you sometimes paint lilies in your studio? That raffiné operation would suit you to a T. I suppose you never made love to a woman who was not the ultra-essence of good-breeding and Grecian outline?"

Sabretasche gave a sort of shudder; whether at some recollection, or at the simple suggestion, I must leave.

"No! as they say in the '*Peau de Chagrin*,' '*je ne conçois pas l'amour dans la misère*; une femme fût-elle attrayante autant que la belle Hélène, la Galatée d'Homère.

n'a plus aucun pouvoir sur mes sens pour peu qu'elle soit crottée.' I never did understand adoring barmaids and worshipping cooks; the vernacular does for me."

"Well, chacun à son goût," said De Vigne; "Cupid has a vernacular of his own which levels rank sometimes. According to some men a pretty face is a pretty face whether it is under a Paris bonnet or a cottage straw. But what I dislike so in this sort of affair is the false light in which it makes one stand. Here am I, who don't see Vigne for nine months out of the year, sometimes not at all, who delegate all the bother of it to my steward, who neither know nor care when the rents are paid, nor how the lands are divided, cheered by these people as if I were a sort of god and king over them—and they mean it, too. Their fathers' fathers worshiped my fathers' fathers, and so they, in a more modern fashion, cheer, and toast, and fête me as if I were a combined Cincinnatus and Titus, who live only for the welfare of my people, and go to bed dissatisfied if I can't count up the good deeds I have done in the past day. You know well enough I am nothing of the kind. I don't think I have a spark of benevolence in my composition. I could no more get up an interest in model cottages and prize fruit than I could in Cochin-Chinas or worsted work, and the consequence is that I feel a hypocrite, and instead of returning thanks to-day to my big farmers and my small retainers, I should have liked to have said to them, 'My good fellows, you are utterly mistaken in your man. I am glad you are all doing well, and I won't let any of you be ground down if I know it, but otherwise I don't care a jot about you, and this annual affair is a very great bore to me, whatever it may be to you; and I take this opportunity of assuring you that, far from being a demigod, I am a very graceless cavalry man, and instead of doing any good with my forty thousand a year,

I only make ducks and drakes of it as fast as I possibly can.' If I had said that to them I should have relieved myself, had no more toadying, and felt that the Vigneites and I understood one another. What a horrid bother it is one can't tell truth in the world !"

"Most people find the bother lie in having to tell the truth occasionally," said the Colonel, with his enigmatical smile. "You might enjoy having, like Fénelon's happy islanders, only to open your eyes to let your thoughts be read, but I am afraid such an exposé would hardly suit most of us. You don't agree with Talleyrand, that language is given us to conceal our thoughts."

De Vigne looked at him as he poked up his pipe.

"Devil take you, Sabretasche ! Who is to know what you mean, or what you think, or what you are ?"

"My dear fellow," said the Colonel, cutting the *Westminster* slowly with one hand, and taking out his cigar with the other, "nobody, I hope, for *I* agree with Talleyrand if you don't."

The County came—a few to dinner, many to the ball, presenting all the varied forms of that peculiar little oligarchy; a duke, two marquises, two earls, four or five barons, high-dried, grand old dowagers, with fresh, pretty-looking daughters as ready for fun and flirtation as their maids; stilted county queens, with daughters long on hand, who had taken refuge in High-Churching their village, and starched themselves very stiff in the operation; pretty married women, who waltzed in a nutshell, and had many more of us after them than the girls; county beauties, accustomed to carry all before them at race balls if not at Almack's, and to be empresses at archery fêtes if they were only units in Belgravia; hunting baronets, who liked the music of the pack when they throw up their heads much better than the music of D'Albert's waltzes; members with

the down hardly on their cheeks; other members, whose mission seemed much more in the saddle than the benches; rectorſ by the dozen, who found a village dance on the green sinful, but a ball at Vigne a very pardonable error; scores of military men, who flirted more desperately and meant less by it than any fellows in the room; all the county, in fact, and among them little old Fantyre, with her hooked nose, and her queer reputation, her dirty, priceless lace, and her jewels got nobody knew how, and whether her daughter, niece, protégée, companion, the inconnue, the intrigante, the interloper, but decidedly the belle, hard, handsome, haughty Constance Trefusis. Magnificent she looked in some geranium-hued dress, as light and brilliant as summer clouds, with the rose tint of sunset on them, and large white water-lilies in her massive raven hair, turned back à l'impératrice off her low brow, under which her eyes shot such dangerous Parthian glances. One could hardly wonder that De Vigne offended past redemption the Duchess of Mangoldwurzels, ruined himself for life with his aunt, the Marchioness of Marqueterie, annoyed beyond hope of pardon the Countess of Ormolu, the five baronesses, all the ladies in their own right, all the great heir-esses, all the county princesses-royal, all the archery-party beauties, and, careless of rank, right, or comment, opened the ball with—the Trefusis. It was her triumph par excellence, and she knew it. She knew enough of De Vigne to know that what he dared to begin he would dare to follow out, and that the more animadversion he provoked, the more certainly would he persevere in his own will.

“We have lost the game!” said Sabretasche to me, as he passed me, waltzing with Adelina Ferrers.

It was true. De Vigne waltzed that same waltz with Constance Trefusis; I can see him as if it were last evening, whirling her round, the white lilies of her bouquet de cor-

sage crushed against his breast, her forehead resting on his shoulder, his moustaches touching her hair as he whispered in her ear, his face glad, proud, eager, impassioned; while the county feminines sneered, and whispered behind their fans, what could De Vigne possibly see in that woman? and the men swore what a deuced fine creature she was, and wondered what Trefusis she might be.

And that waltz over, De Vigne gave her his arm and led her out of the ball-room to take some ice, and, when the ice was disposed of, strolled on with her into the conservatories—those matchless conservatories, thanks to Lady Flora, brilliant as the glories of the tropics, and odorous as a rich Indian night, with the fragrance exhaling from citron and cypress groves, and the heavy clusters of magnolias and mangoes. There, in that atmosphere, that hour, so suited to banish prudence and fan the fires of passion—there, to the woman beside him, glorious as one of the West Indian flowers above their heads, but chill and unmoved at heart as one of their brilliant and waxen petals—De Vigne poured out in terse and glowing words the love that she had so madly and strangely awakened, laying generously and trustfully, as knight of old laid his spoils and his life at his queen's feet, his home, his name, his honor before Constance Trefusis. She simulated tenderness to perfection; she threw it into her lustrous eyes, she forced it into her blushing cheek, it trembled in her softened voice, it glanced upward under her tinted lashes. It was all a lie, but a lie marvelously well acted; and when De Vigne bent over her, covering her lips with passionate caresses, drinking in with every breath a fresh draught of intoxication, his heart beating loud and quick with the triumph of success, was it a marvel that De Vigne forgot his past, his future, his own experience, others' warnings, anything and everything, save the Present, in its full and triumphant delirium?

PART THE SIXTH.

I.

SOME OF THE COLONEL'S PHILOSOPHY.

"I SAY, Arthur—she has outwitted us!"

"The devil she has, Colonel!"

"Who would have believed him so mad?"

"Who would have believed her so artful?"

"Chevasney, men are great fools."

"And women wonderful actresses, Colonel."

"Right; but it is a cursed pity."

"That De Vigne is taken in, or that women are embodied lies, sir—which?"

"Both."

And with his equanimity most unusually ruffled, and his nonchalant impassiveness strangely disturbed, Sabretasche turned away out of the ball-room which De Vigne and the Trefusis, after a prolonged absence, had just re-entered, his face saying plainly enough that Constance was won; hers telling as clearly that Vigne and its master were caught.

When the dawn was rising brightly over the tall elm-trees, and the great iron gates had closed after the last carriage-wheels, De Vigne was talking to his mother in her dressing-room. He wished to tell, yet he shrank from paining her—it came out with a jerk at last—"My mother, wish me joy! I have won her, and *I* have no fear!"

How often she remembered him as he stood there in the full light; with so much youth and trust in his face, so much joy and passion in his eyes, such a clear, happy ring in his voice! When she fully realized his words, she burst

into an agony of tears, the most bitter she had ever shed for him; for whatever in his whole life De Vigne's faults might be to others, in his conduct to his mother he had none. He let her tears have their way; he hardly knew how to console her; he only put his arm gently round her as if to assure her that no wife should ever come between her and him. When she raised her head, she was deathly pale—pale as if the whole of his future hung a dead and hopeless weight upon her. She said no more against it; it was done, and she was both too wise and loved him too truly to vex and chafe him with useless opposition. But she threw her arms round him, and kissed him, long and breathlessly, as she had kissed him in his child's cot long ago, thinking of his father lying dead on the Indian shore with the colors for his shroud.

“My darling! my darling! God bless you! God give you a happy future, and a wife that will love you, as you can love—will love!”

That passionate broken prayer was all his mother ever said to him of his marriage. But when De Vigne, in all the happy spirits and high exultation of his successful passion, was riding and driving with his fiancée, or knocking down the birds in the open, or waltzing with the Trefusis, and lingering in delicious tête-à-têtes where the hours slipped away uncounted, or laughing and jesting with us, when the ladies were gone, in the luxurious *laissez-aller* of the smoking-room, I doubt not his mother spent many a bitter hour weeping over that future which the prescience of affection only too truly revealed to her.

De Vigne received few congratulations; but that sort of thing was quite contrary to his taste, and I think he was far too full of delirious success to notice the omission, or to resent his aunt's chill hauteur, or his cousins' sneering innuendoes; on more opposition none of his relatives, not

even the overbearing and knock-me-down Marcioness of Marqueterie, who gave the law to everybody, dared to venture. She only expressed her opinion by ordering her own carriage for the hour and the day in which the Trefusis came for the first time to stay at Vigne. Sabretasche never opened his lips on the subject to De Vigne, or anybody else; but De Vigne, never at any time a tenacious or quickly-irritated man, was too much attached to the Colonel, who had almost as great a fascination for one sex as for the other, to take exception at his silence, and was, indeed, too well content with his venture to care or inquire what everybody else thought of it. Lady Flora treated the Trefusis with a generous courtesy, that did its best to grow into something warmer, and watched her with a wistful anxiety that was very touching; but it was evident to every one that, though Constance was most carefully attentive, reverential, and gentle to De Vigne's mother, repressing everything in herself, or in Lady Fantyre, that could in the slightest degree shock or wound her refined and highly cultivated taste, she and Lady Flora could never assimilate, or even approach; that careful courtesy was all that would ever link them together, and that in this instance at least, the extremes did *not* touch.

However, for the three weeks longer that I remained there, on the surface all went on remarkably smooth. The Ferrers, of course, had left with their mother. The Trefusis, as I have said, was irreproachable in style, showed no undue pride and exultation in her triumph, and would have had you believe that she only existed to ministrate to the happiness of De Vigne. Sabretasche was infinitely too polished a gentleman to show disapproval of what he had no earthly business with, and limited himself to an occasional satiric remark on the Trefusis, so veiled in subtle wit and courtesy, that, shrewd as she was, she felt the sting, but

could not find the point of attack clearly enough to return it. De Vigne, of course, saw everything *colour de rose*, poor old fellow! and only chafed with impatience at the probation of an engagement which the Trefusis, having custom, the world, and her trousseau in her eye, would not allow to end before Christmas, (I think she rather enjoyed fretting and irritating him with denial and delay;) and his mother resigned herself to the inevitable, and did her very best, poor lady! to find out some trace of that beauty of heart, thought, and mind, which her delicate feminine instinct had told her was wanting in the magnificent personal gifts with which nature had enriched the woman who was to be De Vigne's wife.

So all went harmoniously on at Vigne throughout that autumn; and the Mangoldwurzels family, and the House of Ormolu, and all the rest of the County, talked themselves hoarse, speculating on the union of Granville de Vigne, one of the best matches, and one of the proudest names in England, and an unknown, sans rank, prestige, history, or anything to entitle her to such an honor, in whom, whether she were daughter, niece, protégée, or companion of that disreputable old woman, Sarah Lady Fantyre, society could decide nothing for certain, nor make out anything at all satisfactory. No wonder the County were up at arms, and hardly knew which to censure the most—De Vigne for daring to make such a *mésalliance*, or the Trefusis for daring to accept it.

“If I ever took the trouble (which I don't, because hate is an exhausting and silly thing) to hate anybody, it would be that remarkably handsome and remarkably detestable woman,” said Sabretasche, as he wrapped a plaid round his knees on the box of the drag that was to convey him and me from Vigne to the station, to take the train for Northamptonshire, in which county, well beloved of every

Englishman for the mere name of Pytchley, Sabretasche was going down for the five weeks that still remained of his leave, and had invited me to accompany him.

As he whispered this adverse sentiment, I turned to look at her as we drove down the avenue. She was dressed (why do I never think of that woman without recollecting her dress? was it because she owed so much to it?) en amazone, for her saddle-horse was being led up and down, with De Vigne's. She leant on De Vigne's arm, the tight dark jacket setting off to perfection the magnificent outlines of her matchless figure, and her black wide-awake, with its few cock's feathers, not shading one iota of her severe aquiline profile. She waved us a gracious farewell with her little riding switch, and he—God bless him!—shouted out at last "Good-by, old fellows!" We left them standing under the brown elm boughs: she looking round the wide expanse of park and woodlands that would soon be hers, he gazing down upon the glorious face and form that would soon be his, the noon radiance of the October sunshine falling full upon them, and on the mullion windows and fantastic corbels and grand outline of the old house beyond them. Then the bays dashed down the avenue, scattering the loose gravel upon either side, the drag rolled past the lodge, the iron gates swung to with a loud clang, and I saw De Vigne and Constance Trefusis no more till their marriage-day.

I went into Northamptonshire, to a box the Colonel had taken from a friend of his, who, being suddenly called to the Cape, had to leave it unoccupied, and enjoyed myself uncommonly there, hunting with that most slap-up of packs, and managing more than once to be in at the finish, by dint of following that best of mottoes, for which we are indebted to the best master of hounds that ever rode to cover, "Throw your heart over, and your horse will fol-

low." I had wonderfully good fun there in that pretty county, consecrated to fox-hunting and apple-trees, view halloo and cider, for in every part of England Sabretasche had hosts of friends, and where he went there was certain to be gathered the best fellows, the best wits, and the best wine anywhere about. Each day I spent with him I grew, without knowing it, more and more attached to the Colonel; the more I saw of him in his own house, so perfect a gentleman, so perfect a host, the longer I listened to his easy, playful talk on men and things, his subtle and profound satire on hypocrisies and follies. It was impossible not to get, as ladies say, fond of Sabretasche; his courtly urbanity, his graceful generosity, his countless accomplishments, his ready wit, all made him so charming a companion, though of the real man it was difficult, as De Vigne said, to judge, through the nonchalance, indolence, impassiveness, with which the Colonel chose to veil all that he said or did. He might have had some secret or other in his past life, or his present career, which no man ever knew; he might be only, what he said he was, an idler, a trifler, a dilettante, a blasé and tired man of the world, a nil admirari-ist. Nobody could tell. Only this I could see after a long time, gay, careless, indolent as he was, that in spite of the refined selfishness, the exquisite epicureanism, the light-heartedness, and the luxurious enjoyment of life that his friends and foes attributed to him, Vivian Sabretasche, like most of the world's merry-makers, was sometimes sad enough at heart.

"Friends? I don't believe in friends, my dear boy," said the Colonel, one night when we sat over the fire discussing olives and claret and Latakia at our ease, after a long run with the Pytchley, a splendid burst over the country, and fifteen minutes alone with the hounds. "Live as long as I—which is twice the term by experience that it

is by years—and you will have learnt to take those mythical individuals at their value. I have scores of friends who come, and are particularly kind to me, when they want something out of me. I have cousins who quite idolize me if they wish for a commission for their son, or a presentation at court. I have an Orestes and Iolaüs and Pylades in every quarter when I am wanted to ballot for them at White's or the Travelers', or give them introductions at Vienna or Rome, or push them through into London society. There are hundreds of good fellows who like Vivian Sabretasche, and run after him because he amuses them, and is a little of the fashion, and is held a good judge of their wine, and their stud, and their pictures. But let Vivian Sabretasche come to grief to-morrow, let his Lares go to the Jews, and his Penates to the devil; let the clubs, instead of quoting, black-ball him, and the *Court Circular*, instead of putting him in the Fashionable Intelligence, cite him among the Criminal Cases, and lament how Lucifer, son of the morning, is fallen, which of his bosom friends will be so anxious then to take his arm down St. James's Street? which of them all will fêter and invite and flatter him? Will Orestes then send him such haunches of venison? Will Iolaüs uncork his comet wine for him, and Pylades stretch out his hand to him, and pick his fallen pride out of the dirt of the gutter, and fight his battle for him when he has crippled himself? Pshaw! my dear Arthur, I take men at my valuation, not at their own. Don't you know—

Si vous êtes dans la détresse,
O mes amis, cachez le bien,
Car l'homme est bon et s'intéresse
A ceux qui n'ont besoin de rien!"

"It is a sad doctrine, Colonel," said I, who was a boy then, and wished to disbelieve him.

He laughed a little. "Sad? Oh, I don't see that. The first awakening to it may be, is, to many a young fellow beginning life with the fancies and hopes of youth; but nothing in life is worth calling sad. According to Heraclitus, everything is sad; according to Democritus, nothing is sad. The true secret is to take things as they come, and not trouble yourself sufficiently about anything to give it power to trouble you. Enjoy your youth. Take mine and Ovid's counsel—

*Utendum est ætate. Cito pede labitur ætas. . . .
Hac mihi de spina grata corona data est."*

"But how's one to keep clear of the thorns?"

"By flying, butterfly-like, from rose to rose, and handling it so delicately as not to give it time to prick you. Love makes a poetic and unphilosophic man, like Dante or Petrarch, unhappy; but do you suppose that Lauzun, Grammont, the Duc de Richelieu, were ever made unhappy by love? No; the very idea makes one laugh; the poets took it au sérieux, and suffered in consequence; the courtiers only made it their pastime par excellence, and enjoyed it proportionately. It all depends on the way one lays hold of the roses of life; some men only enjoy the dew and fragrance of the flower, others mismanage it somehow, and get only the thorns."

"You've the secret, then, Colonel," said I, laughing, "for you get a whole conservatory of the most delicious roses under the sun, and not a thorn, I'd bet, among them all."

"Or, at all events, my skin is hard enough not to be pricked by them," smiled Sabretasche. "I think many men begin life like the sand on the top of a drum, obeying every undulation of the air from the notes of a violin near; they are sensitive and susceptible, shrinking at wrong or

injury, easily moved, quickly touched. As years go on, the same men are like the same sand when it has been pressed, and hardened, and burnt in fusion heat, and exposed to chill frosty air, and made into polished, impenetrable glass, on which you can make no impression, off whose icy surface everything glides away, and which it is impossible to cut with the hardest and keenest of knives. The sand is the same sand; it is the treatment it has met with that has changed it. How I do prose to you, Arthur; and of all ~~As~~ the one a man has least right to inflict on another is his own theories or ideas. Fill your glass, my boy, and pass me those macaroons. How can those poor creatures live who don't know of the Marcobrunnen and macaroons of existence? It is a good thing to have money, isn't it? It not only buys us friends, but it buys us what is of infinitely more value—all the pleasant little agréments of life. I would not keep in the world at all if I did not lie on rose-reaves."

Wnerewith the Colonel nestled himself more comfortably into his delicious arm-chair, laid his head on the velvet cushions, closed his eyes, and smoked away at his perfumed hookah, full of the most fragrant and delicate scented tobacco. My short clay was, I believe, an abomination to his senses, which courtesy alone induced him to tolerate. Sardanapalus himself, or the most exquisitely fastidious Pompeian or Greek, might have come to live with Sabretasche in a state of the greatest gratification, though he did dwell in the "Barbarian Isle."

II.

HOW THE MAN MAKES HIS OWN DESTINY, AND THE PATTE
DE VELOURS STRIKES ITS MOST CRUEL WOUND.

ON the 31st of December, Sabretasche and De Vigne, Curly and I (Curly had got his commission in the Cold-streams, and was the prettiest, daintiest, most flattered, and most flirted with young Guardsman of his time) went down by the express, through the snow-whitened fields and hedges, to Vigne, where, contrary to custom, its master was to take his bride on the first morning of the New Year. It was to be a very gay wedding, of course. De Vigne, always liberal to excess, now perfectly lavish in his gifts, had, with the delicacy of warm feeling, followed the French fashion, he said, and given her a corbeille fit for a princess of blood royal, which the Trefusis, having no delicacy of appropriation, accepted as a right. There were to be twelve bridesmaids, not the quite exclusive and ultra high-bred young ladies that would have followed Adelina or Blanche Ferrers, but still very stylish-looking girls, acquaintances of the Trefusis. There was to be such a breakfast and such rejoicings as had never before been seen even at that proverbially magnificent place, where everything was ever done en grand seigneur. Such a wedding was entirely contrary to De Vigne's taste and ideas, but the more others had chosen to run down the Trefusis, the more did he, in his knightly heart, delight to honor her, and therefore had he asked pretty well everybody he knew, and everybody went; for all who knew him liked and wished him well, except his aunt, the Marchioness of Marqueterie, and, par conséquent, the Ladies Ferrers. *They* went, because else the world might have said that they were disappointed Granville

had not married Blanche; but very far from wishing him well, I think they fervently hoped he would repent his hasty step in sackcloth and ashes, and their costly wedding presents were very like Judas's kisses. Wedding presents singularly often are. As she writes the delicate mauve-tinted congratulatory note, wishing dearest Adeliza every joy that earth can give, and assuring her she is the very beau ideal of a perfect wife, is not Madame ten to one saying to her elder daughter, "How strange it is that Fitz should have been taken in—such a bold, flirty girl, and nothing pretty in her, to my taste?" And as we shake Fitz's hand at our club, telling him he is the luckiest dog going to have such a pretty girl, and such a lot of tin by one coup, are we not fifty to one thinking. "Poor devil! he's glad of the tin, I suppose, to keep him out of the Queen's Bench? But, by George! though I *am* hard up, I wouldn't take one of those confounded Pevton women if I knew it? Won't she just check him nicely with her check-book and her consols!"

Whether the congratulations were sincere or not, De Vigne never troubled his head. He had a very happy and sensible indifference to the "*qu'en dira-t'on?*" and he was infinitely too much in love to think for a moment whether the whispers concerning the Trefusis might or might not be true. Most probably, however, they never reached him; reports never *do* those who could investigate or contradict them, though when your horse has fallen under you everybody assures you they knew it from the beginning—they saw it at once—anybody could tell he was broken-winded, and had been down—if they had thought you did not know it, they would have warned you. One could hardly wonder that if the Trefusis had been proved a perfect Messalina or Frédégonde, no man in love with her would have given her up as she sat that last evening of

the Old Year on one of the low couches beside the drawing-room fire at Vigne, as magnificent with the ruddy glow of the fire-gleams upon her as one of Rubens's or Guido's dark glowing, voluptuous goddesses or sybils. De Vigne was leaning over her with eyes for none but her; his mother sat opposite them both, delicate, graceful, fragile, with her diaphanous hands and fair, pure profile, and rich, soft, black lace falling in folds around her, her eyes so pitifully, so yearningly fixed upon her son; while just behind her, playing *écarté* with Curly, who was devotedly fond of that little dangerous French game, was old Lady Fantyre, with her keen, wicked eye, and her rouged, withered cheek, and her fan and feathers, flowers and jewels, and her dress *décolletée* at seventy-six!

"Look at De Vigne!" said Sabretasche to me, as we came out of the music-room, where some of the bridesmaids were singing quartets and glees, as—young ladies do sing who have been taught bravura and thorough bass, and finished by six lessons from Garcia, and imagine they know music "scientifically," as they imagine they know French "thoroughly," though they can't read old Montaigne, and are nonplussed by the gay repartee and idiomatic elegance of a Parisian salon. "His desires on the eve of fulfillment, he imagines his dreams of happiness will be also. How he bends over that chair and looks down into her eyes, as if all his heaven hung there! Twelve months hence he will wish to God he had never looked upon her face."

"Good Heavens, Colonel!" I cried, involuntarily. "What evil or horror do you know of Constance?"

"None of her, personally," said Sabretasche, with a surprised smile. "But is she not a woman; and is not De Vigne, poor fellow, marrying too early? With such premises my phophecy requires no diviner's art to make it a

very safe one. As great a contrast as that roused, atrociously-dressed, abominable old orange-woman is to his own charming and graceful mother, will be De Vigne's real future to his imaginary one. However, he is probably in Socrates' predicament, whether he take a wife or not, either way he will repent, and he must be satisfied; he will have the handsomest woman in England. Few men have as much as that!"

"Ladies ought to hate you, sir," said I, "instead of loving you idolatrously as they do; for you certainly are their bitterest enemy."

"Not I," laughed Sabretasche. "I am very fond of them, except when they try and hook my favorite friends, and then I would say to them as Thales said to his mother, that in their youth they are too young to be fettered, and after their youth they are too old. I am sorry for De Vigne—very sorry; he is doing what in a little time, and for all his life through, he will long and thirst to undo. But he must have his own way; he must do what he chooses, and perhaps, after all, as Emerson says, marriage may be an open question, as it is alleged from the beginning of the world, that such as are in the institution want to go out, and such as are out want to get in. Marriage is like a mirage; all the beauty it possesses lies in keeping at a distance from it."

He moved away with that light laugh which always perplexed you as to whether he meant what he said in mockery or earnest, whether it really vexed him or whether he was only laughing at it, and began to arrange the pieces for a game at chess with one of the ladies. If it vexed and annoyed Sabretasche and myself—we who liked De Vigne as one of the best fellows, and one of the pluckiest, most generous-hearted and most clear-headed men going—it must have made his mother, who literally

idolized him as the sole thing left to her on earth, bitterly sad, to see the impassioned eagerness, the joyous trust with which he looked forward to his future, and know—as she and we, who were not dazzled by the radiance of that exterior beauty of form and feature, knew by instinct—that Constance Trefusis, haughty, overbearing, cold as marble, of neither finished education, cultured mind, nor refined taste, would be the woman of all others from whom, in maturer years, De Vigne would be most certain to revolt. A man's later loves are sure to be an utterly different and distinct style from his earlier. In his youth he only asks for what charms his eyes and senses; in manhood—if he be a man of taste and intellect at all—he will go further, and require interest for his mind and response for his heart.

The last hour of the Old Year chimed at once from the bell-tower of Vigne, the belfry of the old village church, and the countless clocks throughout the house. A little gold Bayadère on the mantle-piece struck the twelve strokes slowly and musically on her tambourine. Lady Flora, in her own boudoir, heard it with passionate tears, and on her knees prayed, as Andromache prayed for the Molossus threatened by the jealous hate of Hermione, for her son's new future that the new year heralded. De Vigne, alone in the library with Constance Trefusis, heard it, and pressed his lips to hers, with words of rapturous delight, to welcome the New Year coming to them both. Sabretasche heard it as he leant over the chair of a very lovely married woman, flirting *à outrance*, and bent backward to me as I passed him: "There goes the death-knell! The last day of De Vigne's freedom is over. Go and put on sackcloth and ashes, Arthur."

The Colonel's words weighed curiously upon me as I rose and dressed on the morning of New Year's-day, as

bright and fair and sunny a dawn as ever broke over the old elm avenues of Vigne. I, a young fellow scarcely two-and-twenty, pretty well as careless, as light-hearted, and as little accustomed to take things au sérieux as any man living, who looked on life and all its chances as gayly as on a game at cricket, who should have come to this wedding as I had gone to a dozen others, only to enjoy myself, drink the Aï and Sillery, and flirt with all the filles d'honneur,—dressed with almost as dead a chill upon me as if I had come to De Vigne's funeral rather than to his marriage—a chill that I could not for the life of me shake off, do what I would. I really loved De Vigne, as he, naturally, never cared for me. I have a sad knack of attaching myself strongly to one or two people, and *only* one or two, and my Frestonhills hero had always been among my weaknesses in that particular. When I was a little chap I all but adored him; our haughty senior, who, when he chose to notice us, was so cordially kind, rattled the stumps so magnificently, lent us his rifle and his hack, and taught us such inimitable rules for batting or long bowling. Afterward, he inviting me to Vigne, and I going into the same troop with him, I had seen more of his generous, straightforward, out-of-the-common character, his clear, vigorous, liberal intellect, and I loved him—loved him far too well to see him throw himself away on the Trefusis, without annoyance and futile regret. There seemed little reason for regret, however, as I met him that morning coming out of his room, and he held out his hand with his sweet sunny smile, the smile that passed over his face with a lightning flash, and lit up his dark eyes, and curved the haughty lines of his mouth into greater archness and sweetness than I ever saw in any man's features. I wished him joy in very few words—I wished it him too well to be able to get up an elegant or studied speech.

"Thank you, dear Arthur," he answered, turning his door-handle with a joyous, light-hearted laugh; "I am sure all the fairies would come and bless my wedding-day if you'd anything to do with the ordering of them. But, thank Heaven! fairies or no fairies, my happiness is safe. Come in, old fellow, and have a cigar—my last bachelor smoke—it will keep me quiet till Constance is out of her maids and filles d'honneur's hands. Faugh! how I hate the folly of wedding ceremonial. The idea of dressing up Love in white favors, and giving him bride-cake! It was not so Cupid and Psyche were wed. I think Eros would have turned his back on the whole affair if they had subjected him to a bishop's drawl and a register's prosaic business. Try those Cubas, Arthur."

He smoked because, my dear young ladies, men accustomed to the horrid weed can't do without it, even on their wedding-day, but quiet he was not; he had at all times more of the tornado in him than anything like the Colonel's equable calm, and he was restless and excitable, and happy as only a man in the same cloudless and eager youth, the same fearless and vehement passion, can be. He soon threw down his Cuba, for a servant came to tell him that his mother would like to see him in her own room; and De Vigne, who had been ceaselessly darting glances at the clock, which, I dare say, seemed to him to crawl on its way, went out joyous as Romeo's

Come what sorrow may
It cannot countervail the interchange of joy,

and never thought of Friar Laurence's prophetic reply:

These violent delights have violent ends,
And in their triumph die; like fire and powder,
Which as they kiss consume.

By noon we were all ready. In the magnificent dining-hall,

with its bronzes and its deer's-heads, and the regimental colors of his father's crack corps looped up between the two end windows, with his helmet, saber, and gloves above them, the breakfast, sumptuous enough to have done for St. James's or the Tuileries, was set out with its gold plate, its hot-house flowers, and its thousand delicacies, and in the church the wedding party was assembled with the noon sun streaming in through the colored light of the stained chapel windows. It was a very brilliant party. There were the Marchioness of Malachite and the Ladies Ferrers, exquisitely got up, of course, though looking bored to the last extreme, and appearing to consider it too great an honor for the mosaic pavement to have the glory of bearing their footsteps. There were other dainty ladies of rank, friends of Lady Flora's, sweet, smiling-looking women in toilettes that might have come out of *Le Follet*, and in which, being ladies born, they were easy and careless as children in brown holland pinafores. There were the dozen bridesmaids in their gauzy dresses and their wreaths of holly or of forget-me-not; there were hosts of men, chiefly military, whose morning mufti threw in just enough shade among the bright dresses, as brilliant by themselves as a bouquet of exotics; there were, strangely enough, close together, bizarre, quick-eyed, queer old Lady Fantyre, and soft, fragile Lady Flora; and there was De Vigne, standing near his mother, chatting and laughing with Sabretasche, but all his senses alive to catch the first sound which should tell him of the advent of his bride.

How well I can see him now, as if it were but yesterday, standing on the altar steps in our plain modern morning dress, where in chain armor and silken doublet, in velvet coat and point-lace ruffles, in powdered wig and Garter and Bath ribbons—his ancestors, through long ages past, had wedded noble gentlewomen and fair patrician girls

from the best and bravest houses in the land—I think I see him now, standing erect, his head up, one hand in the breast of his waistcoat, his eyes, dark as night, brilliant and luminous with eagerness; his mouth, with a shadow of a smile softening its firm, clear-cut lips, a little flush of excitement and anticipation on his usually pale cheek; not a shade, not a wish, not a fear seemed to rest upon him. “By Heaven! she’s not half worthy of him,” I muttered, quite unconsciously speaking my thoughts. His mother heard me; her eyes were riveted on him with a mournful tenderness she could not or did not care to conceal, her lips quivered, she looked at me, and shook her head. That wedding party was very brilliant, but there was a strange, dull gloom over it which every one felt yet nobody could explain, and, save in De Vigne himself, and a few of the bridesmaids and younger men, there was none of the joyous light-heartedness which make “marriage-bells” proverbial for mirth and gayety.

There was a very low but an irrepressible murmur of applause as the Trefusis alighted from her carriage, with her *pro tempo* father and donor. Never had we seen her look so handsome. Her magnificent form was seen to full advantage through the shower of Honiton lace that fell around her and about her from her head, till it trailed behind her on the ground. The glowing damask-rose hue of her cheeks, not one whit the paler this morning, and the splendid contour of her profile, were enhanced, not hidden, by the filmy veil. A wreath of orange-flowers, of course, was in her raven hair, and a ceinture of diamonds, worthy an imperial trousseau—one of the gifts of her lavish and bewitched lover, with a negligé and bracelets like it—were jewels fitted to her fully-developed and magnificent person. Very handsome she was—undeniably handsome, and her figure was matchless; but I looked in vain, as her eyes

rested on De Vigne's, for one saving shadow of love, joy, natural emotion, tremulous feeling, to denote that he was not utterly thrown away—wedded to a matchless statue of responseless marble.

She passed up to the altar with her retinue of bridesmaids, in their snowy dresses and bright wreaths. The service began; one of the Ferrers family, the Bishop of Southdown, read the few words that linked them for life with the iron fetters of the Church. Every one who caught the glad, firm, eager tone of De Vigne's "I will," remembers it to this day—remembers with what trusting love, what unhesitating promptitude he took the vow for "better or worse." Prophetic words that say, whatever ill may come of the rash oath sworn, there will be no remedy for it; no help, no repentance that will be of any avail; no furnace strong enough to unsolder the chains they forge forever!

De Vigne passed the ring over her finger; they knelt down, and the priest stretched his hands over them, and forbade those whom God had joined together any man to put asunder. And they rose—husband and wife. They came down the altar steps, De Vigne's face beautiful in its frank joy, its noble pride, looking down upon her with his brilliant eyes, now soft and gleaming, while she looked straight before her, her full ruby lips slightly parted with a half smile, probably of triumph and exultation, that she, unknown and unsupported, called by all an interloper, by many an intrigante and adventuress, was now the wife of the last of a haughty house, whose pride throughout lengthened centuries had ever been that all its men were brave and all its women pure, that not a taint rested on its name, not a stain upon its blood, not a spot upon its shield.

We passed down the church into the vestry, De Vigne gazing down on her with all the wealth of his passionate

heart; but he had no answering glance of love. The day of acting, because the need for acting, was over now. The register was open. De Vigne took the quill, and dashed down hastily his old ancestral name; he passed it into her hand, with fond whispered words. She took it, threw back her veil, and wrote firmly and clearly,

“CONSTANCE LUCY TREFUSIS—OR ——— DAVIS.”

De Vigne was bending fondly over her, his moustaches touching her hair, with its virginal crown, as she wrote. With one great cry he suddenly sprang up, as men will do upon a battle-field when they are struck with their death-wound. Laying her hands in his he held her away from him, reading her face line by line, feature by feature, with the dim horror of a man in a dream of supernatural agony. She smiled in his face, the smile of a devil.

“Granville de Vigne, do you know me now?”

Yes, he knew her now; he still held her at arm's length, staring down upon her, the truth in all its horror eating gradually into his very life, seeming, as it were, to turn his warm veins to ice, and chill his very heart to stone. She laughed—a low mocking laugh of vengeance and derision, that broke strangely on the dead silence round them.

“Yes! Granville, yes! my young lover, I am your Wife, of your own act, your own will. Do you remember the poor milliner you mocked at? Do you remember the peasant girl you deserted? Do you remember the summer day under the chestnut trees, when you laughed at my threats of vengeance? Do you remember, *my husband*? I vowed then that you should love me again, love me really, love me madly; and that it should be *my* turn to disappoint your passion, to crush your pride, to dishonor you forever in your own eyes and the eyes of all others. Before all your titled friends have I taken my revenge.

that it may be the more complete. I would not wait for it, or spare you one iota of your shame. I renounce my own ambitions to humble you lower still. They are hearing us, all your haughty relatives, your fastidious friends, your aristocratic acquaintance, who have tried so long and so vainly to stop you in your mad passion for me. *They* listen to me, and they will go and tell the world what *you* would never have told it, that the last of his line has given his home, his honor, his mother's place, his father's name—that proud name that only yesterday you told me no disgrace had ever touched, no bad blood ever borne—to the despised love of his boyhood, his own cast-off low-born toy—a beggar's child, a ——”

“Peace!”

At that single word, so stern in its iron command, so full of deep, unutterable agony, she was silenced perforce. The blood had left his lips and cheeks, the ashy hue of death had settled on his forehead in a dark crimson stain, like the stain on his own honor; his eyes were set and fixed, as in the unspeakable torture of the Laocoon; his teeth were clinched as men clinch them in their death struggle; one hand was pressed on his heart; he had let go his hold on hers; he would never touch even her hand again; and he panted for breath as if he were suffocated. In the horror of the moment all round him were dumb and paralyzed; even she, in her rancorous hate and bitter vengeance on him, paused awe-stricken at the ruin she had wrought, silent before the terrible storm of passion, the unutterable anguish, shame, and horror written in his face.

“Peace! woman—devil! Never cross my path again, or I shall not let you go as I do now!”

Speaking with a strange unnatural calm that sounded more fearful to us than the wildest outburst of rage or anguish, De Vigne, with his right hand pressed hard upon

his chest, turned to leave the church. But his mother threw herself before him. "Granville, my love, my darling! stay, for God's sake, stay!"

He strained her to his heart, then put her gently aside to Sabretasche.

"Let me go—let me go!" he said, hoarsely.

We could none of us attempt to stop him. He pushed his way through the crowd like a madman, and we heard the rapid rush of his carriage wheels as they rolled away—God knows where.

PART THE SEVENTH.

I.

SABRETASCHE STUDIES THE BELLE OF THE SEASON.

ON another New Year's Day, eight years from that marriage in the church at Vigne, the full relentless tropic sun streamed down on the parched sand and tangled jungle of India, where, in the sultry stillness of the noon, when all nature was hushed into repose, a contest for life and death raged with all the fury of men's passions unchained and their love of blood unsated. Far away on the blue hills slept the golden noontide rays, still and motionless in the tropic heat; the great palm-leaves folded themselves up for a siesta; the jaguars and the tigers lay couched in the cool dank jungle grass; the florikens and parrots closed their soft, brilliant-hued wings to rest; all nature in the vast mountain solitudes was at peace; even the bananas and bamboos had ceased their gentle motion, and the silver river was calm and unruffled as a tideless lake

pausing in its rapid rush from its mountain cradle to its ocean grave. All nature was hushed and still, except the passions of man; they, always warring, never silenced by the soft voices of inanimate beauties, were struggling fiercely under the low trees and amid the thick jhow jungle. It was a skirmish of English cavalry and Beloochee infantry, in a small plain between large woods or hunting-grounds, and the sun shone with a fiery glow on the dark uniforms, glittering sabers, and white linen helmets of the Europeans, and the gorgeous turbans, bright-hued garments, and large dark shields of the mountaineers, as they struggled together, darkening the air with their clashing swords, and breaking the holy hush of wood and hills with long rolling shouts, loud and terrible as thunder. The mountaineers doubled the English force; they had surprised them, moreover, as, not thinking of attack, they trotted onward from one garrison to another, and the struggle was sharp and fierce. The English were but half a regiment of Hussars, under command of their Major, and the odds were great against them. But at their head was one to whom fear was a word in an unknown tongue, in whose blood was fire, and whose heart was bronze. Sitting down in his saddle as calmly as at a meet, his eyes steady and quick as an eagle's, hewing right and left like a common trooper, the English Major fought his way. The Beloochee swords gleamed round him without harm, while, let them guard their turbans as they might with their huge shields, every stroke of his saber told home. They surged around him, they caught his charger's bridle, they opposed before him one dense and bristling forest of swords; still he bore a charmed life, alike in single combat hand to hand, or in the broken charge of his scattered and decimated troop. In the fierce noontide glow, in the pitiless vertical sun-rays, while the wild shouts of the natives

rang up to the still blue heavens above, and the ceaseless clang and clash of the sabers and shields startled the birds from their rest, and roused the slumbering tiger from his lair, the English Major fought like grim death, as those blows glanced harmless off him, as from Achilles of old; fought till the native warriors, stern and savage heroes as they were, fled from his path, awe-stricken at his fierce valor, his matchless strength, his godlike charm from all their efforts to harm him. He pursued them at the head of his cavalry, after the skirmish was over, some way across the plain; then, as he drew the bridle of his foaming and trembling horse, and put his sword back into its sheath, another man near him looked at him in amazement: "On my life, De Vigne, what an odd fellow you are. You look like the very devil in the midst of the fight; and yet when it's over, after sharper work than any even we have seen, deuce take you if you're not as cool as if you'd walked out of a barrack-yard."

The same 1st of January, while they were enjoying this cavalry skirmish in Scinde, we were being bored to death by a review at Woolwich. The day was soft and bright, no snow or frost, as Sabretasche, with his Italianized constitution, remarked with a thanksgiving. — There were Ours and Cardigan's Eleventh, and the fashion-famous Twelfth, and one or two regiments of Dragoons from Uxbridge and Hounslow, with the Blues from Albany Barracks, some of the line, and several batteries of Horse Artillery; there was Royalty to inspect us; there were some of the prettiest women possible in their carriages in the inner circle, though it was *not* the season; and there was as superb a luncheon as any military man could ask, in the finest mess-room in England; and we, ungrateful, I suppose, for the goods the gods gave us, swore away at it all as the greatest bore imaginable. It is a pretty scene enough, I dare

say, to those who have only to look on; the bright uniforms and the white plumes, the grays and the bays, the chestnuts and the roans, the dashing staff and the cannon's peaceful roar, the marching and the counter-marching, the storming and the sortie, the rush and the charge, and the gallop of four or five troops of horse, formed into line in sections of threes, with their lances gleaming diamond bright in the sunshine, and their chargers spurred along, seemingly with go enough in them, if they were but racers, to win the Derby itself—I dare say it may be all very pretty to lookers-on, but to us, heated and bothered and tired, obliged to go into harness which we hated as cordially as we loved it the first day we sported it in our cornethood, we thought it a nuisance inexpressible, and should have far preferred fatiguing ourselves for some purpose under the jungle-trees in Scinde.

We were profoundly thankful when it was all over and done with, when H.R.H. F.M. had departed to Windsor without luncheon, and we were free to go up and chat with the women in the inner circle, and take them into the mess-room. There were very few we knew, yet up in town; but parliament was just about to meet very unusually early that year, and there were several from jointure houses, or charming places at Richmond, or Twickenham, or Kew, with whom we were well acquainted.

“There is Lady Molyneux,” said Sabretasche, who was now Lieut.-Colonel of Ours. “I dare say that is her daughter with her. I remember she came out last season, and she was very much admired, but I missed her by going that Ionian Isle trip with Brabazon. Shall we go and be introduced, Arthur? She does not look bad style, though to be sure these English winter days are as destructive to a woman's beauty as anything well can be.”

The Colonel wheeled his horse round up to the Moly

neux barouche, and I followed him. Eight years had not altered Sabretasche in one iota; he had led the same lounging, indolent, refined, fashionable, artistic kind of life, his face was as exquisitely handsome, his wit as light and sparkling, his conquests as various and far-famed as ever; he was still soldier, artist, sculptor, dilettante, man of fashion, all in one, the universal criterion of taste, the critic of all beauties, pictures, singers, or horses, popular with all men, adored by all women, and really chained by none. Therefore Vivian Sabretasche, whose word at White's or the U. S. could do more to damage or increase her daughter's reputation as a belle than any other man's, had a very pleasant bow and smile in the distance from Lady Molyneux, and a very delicate lavender kid glove belonging to that peeress, put between his fingers when he and I rode up to her carriage.

"Ah!" cried Lady Molyneux, a pretty, supercilious-looking woman, who was *passée*, but would not by any means allow it, "I am delighted to see you both. We only came to town yesterday. Lord Molyneux has taken a house in Lowndes Square. It was so tiresome of him; but he would do it: he is never happy out of London, and there is positively scarcely a soul that we know here as yet. Rushbrooke persuaded us to come to this review to-day, and Violet wished it. Allow me to introduce my daughter to you. Violet, love, Colonel Sabretasche, Mr. Chevasney, Miss Molyneux."

Violet Molyneux looked up in the Colonel's face as he bowed to her, and probably thought—at least she looked as if she did—that she had never seen any man so attractive as the Colonel, as he returned her gaze with his large, soft, mournful eyes, and that exquisite gentleness and high-breeding of manner, to which he owed half his reputation in the tender secrets of the boudoir and flirting

room; and leaning his hand on the door of the carriage, bent down from his saddle, studying the new belle, while he laughed and chatted with her and her mother. We used to jest, and say Sabretasche kept a list of the new beauties entered for the year—as *Bell's Life* has a list of the young fillies entered for the Oaks—made a cross against those worth noticing, and checked off those already flirted with and slain; for the Colonel—though he was the last man to say so—was indisputably as dangerous to the beau sexe as Pignerol de Lauzun.

Violet Molyneux was certainly worthy of being entered in this mythical book, for she was irresistibly charming and exquisitely lovely; her complexion white as Parian, with a wild-rose color in her cheeks, her eyes large, brilliant, and wonderfully expressive, generally flashing with the sweetest laughter; her hair of a soft, bright, chestnut hue; her figure slight, but perfect in symmetry; on her delicate features the stamp of quick intelligence, heightened by the greatest culture; and in her whole air and manner the grace of good ton and fashionable dress, mingled with the frankness, the vivacity, the joyous light-heartedness, the candid truth-telling of a child. Bright, natural, gifted with the gayest spirits, the cleverest brain, and the sweetest temper possible, one could not wonder that she was talked over at clubs; engaged by more than her tablets could record at every ball; and followed by a perfect cavalcade when she cantered, faster than any other girl would have dreamed of doing in town, down the crowded Ride. Sabretasche soon took her off to the mess-room, a Lieutenant-General escorting her mother, and I found myself sitting on her left at the luncheon, an occasion I did not improve as much as I otherwise should have done, from the fact of Sabretasche's being on the other side, and persuading the young lady to give all her attention to him; for Sabre-

tasche, though he was immeasurably fastidious, and scarcely ever was really interested in any women, liked to flirt with them all, and always made himself charming to them. The Hon. Violet seemed to find him charming too, and chatted with him gayly and frankly, as if she had known him for ages. Though she was one of the admitted belles, and was run after (and enjoyed the pursuit, too) by scores of men, she was free, natural, and unartificial as the little flower after which she had been named; a wonderful treat to Sabretasche, so sick to death of artificialities and commonplaces.

"How I enjoyed the review to-day!" she began. "If there are three sights greater pets of mine than another, they are a review, a race, and a meet, because of the dear horses."

"Or their masters?" said Sabretasche, quietly.

Violet Molyneux laughed merrily.

"Oh! their masters are very pleasant too, though they are certainly never so handsome, or so tractable, or so honest as their quadrupeds. Most of my friends abuse gentlemen. I don't; they are always kind to me, and, unless they are very young or stupid, generally speaking, amusing."

"Miss Molyneux, what a treat!" smiled Sabretasche, who could say impudent things so gracefully that every one liked them from his lips. "You have the candor to *say* what every other young lady *thinks*. We know you all like us very much, but none of you will ever admit it. But you say you enjoyed the review. I thought no belle, after her first season, ever condescended to 'enjoy' anything."

"Don't they?" laughed Violet; "how I pity them! I am an exception, then, for I enjoy an immense number of things—everything, indeed, except my presentation, where I was ironed quite flat, and very nearly crushed to death

and, finally, came before her Majesty in a state of collapse like a maimed India-rubber ball. Not enjoy things! Why, I enjoy my morning gallop on Bonbon, I enjoy my flowers, and birds, and dogs. I delight in the opera, I adore waltzing, I perfectly idolize music, and the day when a really good book comes out, or a really good painting is exhibited, I am in a seventh heaven. Not enjoy things! Oh, Colonel Sabretasche, when I cease to enjoy life, I hope I shall cease to live!"

"You will die very early, then," said Sabretasche, with something of that deepened melancholy which occasionally stole over him, but which he was always careful to conceal in society.

She started, and turned her bright eyes upon him, surprised and stilled:

"Colonel Sabretasche! Why?"

He smiled; his usual gay, courteous smile.

"Because the gods will grudge earth so fair a flower, and men so true a vision, of what angels *ought* to be; but—thanks to Scripture, poets, and painters—never *are*."

She shook her head with a pretty impatience:

"Ah! pray do not waste compliments upon me; I detest them."

"*Vraiment?*" murmured the Colonel, with a little quiet, incredulous glance.

"Yes, I do, indeed. You don't believe me, I dare say. Because I have so many of them, Captain Chevasney? Perhaps it is. I have many more than are really complimentary, either to my taste or my intellect."

"Ladies like compliments as children like bonbons," said Sabretasche, in his low trainante voice. "They will take them till they can take no more; but if they see ever so insignificant a one going to another, how they long for

it, how they grudge it, how they burn to add it to their store! This is œil de perdrix, will you try it?"

"No, thank you," answered the Hon. Violet, with a ringing laugh. The sarcasms on her sex did not seem to touch or disturb her; she rather enjoyed them than otherwise. "What is the news to-day?"

"Nothing remarkable," answered Sabretasche. "Births, deaths, and marriages all put together, to remind men, like Philip of Macedon's valet, that they come into the world to suffer in it, and go out again. Leaders full of toadyism, or bullying of the government, according as the journal is Conservative or Liberal. Long letters from gentlemen, frightfully prone to the didactic style, upon all the evils of England, whose name is legion; yet to remedy which, I question if one of those portly plethoric friends and lovers of the state would like individually to leave his arm-chair and sacrifice his own personal comforts à la Curtius. Letters on the Income-tax, from men who dodge it all their lives; letters on Education, from men who, to judge from their grammar, never received any, and, therefore, you will say, can the better, perhaps, appreciate the luxuries of it; letters on Religious Impetus, written by the aid of a whisky-bottle; articles on Ragged Schools, penned eloquently by scoundrels in quod; extraordinary meteors thrown in to fill up a gap; criticisms on good novels by beardless boys, who don't know the meaning of half their words or quotations. Much like all other news, you see, Miss Molyneux, except that your name is down as among those arrived in town, and my friend De Vigne is mentioned for the Bath."

"Ah! that Major de Vigne!" cried Violet. "Where is he?—who is he?—what has he really been doing? I heard Lord Hilton talking about him last night, saying that he had been a most wonderful fellow in India, and

that the natives called him—what was it?—‘the Charmed Life,’ I think. Is he your friend?”

“My best,” said Sabretasche. “Not Jonathan to my David, you know, nor Iolaüs to my Orestes: we don’t do that sort of thing in these days. We like each other, but as for dying for each other, that would be far too much trouble; and, besides, it would be bad ton—too demonstrative. But I like him; he is as true steel as any man I know, and I shall be delighted to have a cigar with him again, provided it is not too strong a one. Dying for one’s Patroclus would be preferable to enduring his bad tobacco.”

Violet looked at him with her radiant, beaming glance:

“Well, Colonel Sabretasche, if your cigar is not kindled warmer than your friendship, it will very soon go out again, that’s all!”

“Soit! there are plenty more in the case,” smiled Sabretasche, “and one Havana is as good as another, for anything I see. But about De Vigne you have heard quite truly; he has been fighting in Scinde like all the Knights of the Round Table merged in one. He is Major of the —th Hussars, and he has done more with his handful than a general of division might have done with a whole squadron. His Colonel was put hors de combat with a ball in his hip, and De Vigne, of course, had the command for some time. The natives call him the Charmed Life, because, despite the risks he runs, and the carelessness with which he has exposed his life, he has not had a single scratch, and both the Sepoys he fights with, and the Beloochees he fights against, stand in a sort of awe of him. The —th is ordered home, so we are looking out to see him soon. I shall be heartily glad, poor old fellow!”

“Provided, I suppose, he bring cheroots with him good enough to allow him admittance?” said Violet.

"Sous-entendu," said the Colonel. "I would infinitely prefer losing a friend to incurring a disagreeable sensation. Would not you?"

"Oh! of course," answered the young lady, with a rapid flash of her mischievous eyes. "Frederick's feelings, when he saw Katte beheaded, must have been trifling child's play to what the Sybarite suffered from the doubled rose-leaves!"

"Undoubtedly," said Sabretasche, tranquilly. "I am glad you agree with me. If we do not take care and undouble the rose-leaves for ourselves, we may depend on it we shall find no one who will take so much trouble for us. To 'Aide-toi et Dieu t'aidera' they should add 'Aide-toi et le monde t'aidera,' for I have always noticed that Providence and the world generally befriend those who can do without the help."

"Perhaps there is a deeper meaning in that," answered Violet, "and more justice than first seems. After all, those who do aid themselves may deserve it the most, and those whose heads and hands are silent and idle hardly have a right to have the bonbons of existence picked out and given to them."

"I don't know whether we have a right to them, but we find them pleasant, and that is all I look at; and besides, Miss Molyneux, when you have lived a little longer in the world, you will invariably find that it is to those who have much that much is given, and *vice versâ*. Guineas pour into the gold plate held by that 'decidedly pious person' Lord Savinggrace, but pence will do for the parish poor-box. Turtle and tokay are given to an heir-apparent, but a cutlet and new port will suffice for a younger son. Establish yourself on a pedestal, the world will worship you, even though the pedestal be of very poor brick and mortar; lie modestly down on a moorland, though it be, like James

Fergusson, for genius to study science, why, you may lie there forever if you wait for anybody to pick you up."

"True enough," said Violet, "because the guineas given to Lord Savinggrace will bring you *éclat* in the 'religious world,' (an *éclat*, by the way, I should shun as offensive alike to good taste and all decency,) and in the parish poor-box their name is unrecorded. With the heir-apparent they look for numberless good dinners in return, whereas the younger son can do them no good whatever; and, with regard to the pedestal, why, we know the nation ran after and caressed Castlemaine, while they neglected and starved John Milton, because the countess held good things in her gift, and the poet was poverty-stricken and on the side of a fallen cause."

Sabretasche laughed.

"Yes, the world has a trick of serving, like the Swiss Guard and the secret police, whichever side is uppermost and pays them best. However, thank Heaven I want nothing of it, and it is very civil to me."

"*Because* you want nothing of it?"

"Precisely."

II.

THE "CHARMED LIFE" COMES BACK AMONG US.

"THANK God I have found a girl who has some notion of conversation. I believe with the Persians that ten measures of talk were sent down from heaven, and the ladies took nine; but of conversation, argument, repartee—the real use of that most facile, dextrous, sharp-pointed weapon, the tongue—what woman has a notion? They employ a thousand superlatives in describing a dress, they

exhaust a million expletives in damning their losom friend, their boudoirs hear more twaddle than the Commons—si c'est possible—and they rail harder over their coffee-cups at their sisters' shortcomings than a popular preacher over his sounding board at the vices he pets *sub rosâ*. But as for conversation, they have not a notion of it; if you begin an argument, they either get into a passion or subside into monosyllables. If you chat with them at a ball, the silly ones will rattle you to death on the score of fashion, new hobbies, fresh scandals, and the most strictly private on dits; the clever ones will knock you down with a 'decided opinion,' and so bewilder your mind with Greek roots, graptolites, modern economics, or Silurian strata, that you feel humbled into the lowest depths of your bottes vernies, and cut bas blues for the rest of your existence; and if you chance, which it is ten to one you do, on the simple ingénues, *they* drive you distracted by their Yes and their No, their measured-out enthusiasms, a wine-glassful for Jenny Lind, a tumblerful for Tennyson, and a good pint for the Exeter Hall meetings. A woman who has good conversation is as rare as one who does not care for scandal. I have met them occasionally in Paris salons, and we have found one to-day."

So spoke Sabretasche at mess that night apropos of Violet Molyneux, who was under discussion in common with our ox-tail and our wine.

"Then you allow her the croix d'honneur of your approval, Colonel," said Montressor, of Ours.

"Certainly I do," said Sabretasche. "This soup is not good, it is too thin. She is exquisitely pretty, even through my eye-glass, which has a sad knack of finding the lilies *cosmetique* and the eyebrows tinting, and, what is much better, she is actually natural and fresh, and can talk as if Nature had given her brains and reading had cultivated

them. I dare say they count on her making a good marriage."

"No doubt they do. Jockey Jack has hardly a rap, and is as poor for a peer as I should be for a professional beggar—the richest chaps going," replied another man—Snaffle Pigott, (we called him Snaffle, after a match he won driving from Hounslow to Knightsbridge Mews.) "They can't keep up their Irish place—Corallyne, isn't it called?—so they hang out in town three parts of the year, and take a shooting-box, or visit about for the rest. Confound it, I wouldn't be one of the Upper House, without a good pot of money to keep up my dignity, for anything I could see. Violet came out last season, you know?"

"Yes, I know; I remember hearing she made a great sensation," answered the Colonel. "Jack Ormsby and Allington told me she was the best thing of the season—the first, by-the-by, I was ever out of London. Lady Molyneux must try to run down Regalia or Cavendish Grey, or one of the great matrimonial coups. My lady knows how to manœuvre, too; I wonder she should have a daughter so frank and unaffected."

"They've seen nothing of one another," answered Pigott, who always knew everything about everybody, from the price Lord Goodwood gave for his thorough-bred roan fillies, to the private thoughts that Lady Honoria Bandonline wrote each night in her violet velvet diary. "My lady's always running out somewhere; if you were to call at eight in the morning you'd find her gone off to early matins; if you were to call at twelve, she'd be off to the Sanctified and Born-again Clear-starchers' jubilee with Lord Savinggrace; at two, she'd be closeted and lunching with her spiritual master—whoever he chanced to be—who gives her confession and takes croquis and Amon-tillado en même temps; at three, she'd be having a snug

boudoir flirtation; at four, she'd be in the Park, of course, or at a morning concert; at six, she'd be dressing for dinner; at ten, she'd be off to three or four soirées musicales, balls, and crushes; and so between the two she certainly carries out that delightful work, 'How to Make the Best of Both Worlds,' which my Low Church sister sent me the other day."

"With the idea that you were doing your very utmost to make the worst of 'em, Charlie?" laughed Sabretasche. "I don't know the volume—Heaven forefend!—but the title sounds to me sneaky, as if it wanted to get the sweets out of both, yet compromise itself with neither. Your sketch of Lady Molyneux is as true to life as one of Leech's delicious sketches of character, but certainly her child is about as unlike her as could possibly be imagined."

"Oh, by George! yes," assented Montessor, heartily; "Miss Vy hasn't one bit of nonsense about her."

"And she's a divine waltzer," added Stafford Gore; "turn her round in a nutshell."

"And can't she ride, just!" broke in little Fan, just joined.

"And her voice smashes Alboni's to pieces—her shake's perfection," cried Telfer, a bit of a dilettante, and a composer in a small way for the flute.

"And—she can talk!" said Sabretasche, in his quiet voice, so low and gentle after the other fellows. "I will call in Lowndes Square to-morrow. I say, so the —th is ordered home. We shall see De Vigne home again."

"Unless he exchange to a regiment still on active service," said Pigott.

"He won't do that," I answered. "I heard from him last Marseilles mail, and he said that as his troop was ordered to England, he intended to return overland. Poor dear old fellow! what ages it is since we've seen him!"

"It is eight years, isn't it?" said Sabretasche, setting down his champagne-glass with half a sigh. "He has had some sharp work out there. I hope it has done him good. I never wish to see a man look as he looked last time I saw him."

"Where's his rascally wife!" asked Montessor.

"The Trefusis? For Heaven's sake don't call her his wife," said I, impatiently. "I'll never give her his name, though the law may—she-devil that she is. She is at Paris, cut by all our set, of course, but living with her antique Mephistopheles the Fantyre, in part of a dashing hotel in the Champs Elysées, keeping a green and gold chasseur six feet high, and giving very suivies soirées to a certain class of untitled English and titled French, who don't care a fig for her story, and care a good deal for her suppers."

"Which she buys with De Vigne's tin, hang her!" swore Montessor. "She calls herself Mrs. De Vigne, I suppose?"

"She *is* Mrs. De Vigne," said Sabretasche, with that bitter sneer which occasionally passed over his delicate, impassive features. "You forget the sanctity, solemnity, and beauty of the marriage tie, my dear Montessor. You know it is too 'holy' to be severed, either by reason, justice, or common sense."

"Holy fiddlesticks!" retorted Montessor, contemptuously; "the best law for that confounded woman would have been Lynch law, and if I'd had my way, I would have taken her out of church that morning and shot her straight away out of hand."

"Too handsome to be shot, Fred," said Pigott; "if she'd been an ugly woman, I would say yes, but there are too few faces like that to rid the earth of them."

"She will not be so handsome in a few years; she will

soon grow coarse," said the Colonel, that most fastidious of female critics. "She is the full-blown dashing style to strike you youngsters, and send you mad about her, but there is not in her face a single charm that will *last*."

"Are there in any?" cried Pigott. "None last long with you, Colonel, I fancy?"

Sabretasche laughed gayly.

"To be sure not!

Therefore is love said to be a child,
Because in choice he is so oft beguiled.

Don't you admit the truth of that?"

"I should hope I do. Well, after all, his marriage won't matter dreadfully to De Vigne, except the loss of the three thousand pounds a year he allows her to make her keep on the Continent; though, to be sure, there's the blow to his pride, and he is a terribly proud fellow."

Sabretasche looked up. "Some men's honor is sensitive, Pigott; others—like their understandings—somewhat dull."

Pigott did not relish it; his fastidiousness was not as delicate as the Colonel's or De Vigne's, and his gift of brains as small as ever passed a man through Sandhurst, about the minimum, I should say, of mortal intelligence.

"Well, why did he do it? He needn't have been such a fool!" he said, sulkily.

Sabretasche's soft, mournful eyes lit up angrily.

"If you are never more of a fool, Pigott, than De Vigne, you may thank Heaven! His generosity and nobility of nature were deceived and wronged, and his hot passions led him into an error of judgment which will darken all his life; but if every man I know were as worthy respect and admiration as he, the world would be a better one, and *I*, at least, will never sit by to hear him ridiculed."

Those were very strong words from our gay, careless, laissez-faire, impassive, indolent Colonel, and they had their effect accordingly. He spoke very quietly—not raising his voice; but Pigott cared to provoke him no further. He drank down his sherry with rather a nervous laugh.

“Oh! we all know he’s a brick, and all I hope is, that he won’t come home and tumble into love with Violet Molyneux, or some other young filly.”

Sabretasche laughed; he hated dissensions, and was always ready to restore harmony to any table.

“I hope not, too. That young Irish beauty is exceedingly love-provoking. She has done a good deal of damage, hasn’t she?”

Six weeks or so after our Woolwich review, I was dining with Sabretasche at his own house—one of those charming exclusive little dinner parties where he invited first-rate wits to partake of first-rate wines, and where every one, even the most blasé, was perforce amused and pleased. The other men had just left, (all men celebrated for talent and ton, for the entrée to Sabretasche’s house was as difficult as a pass to Almack’s, when Almack’s was in its prime,) and the Colonel and I were sitting before the inner drawing-room fire with the Cid stretched on the rug between us; Sabretasche lying full length on a sofa inhaling perfume from his luxurious hookah, and I in a low chair smoking a Manilla. Why the Colonel was so kind to me, and talked so much to me, when he had all the best men in town at his command, I must leave. I never did understand it, and never shall. I think it was, first, my being honest and fresh to life that he liked; and afterward, probably, our mutual attachment to, and sorrow for, De Vigne, gave us something in common. We were talking of him tonight, for the —th had been ordered home, and he coming

by himself, *viâ* Marseilles, was expected in a few days at furthest.

"What a sin it is that such a union should be valid," said Sabretasche. "I think I hear that wretched woman tell me, with her cold triumphant smile, 'Colonel Sabretasche, my father's name was Trefusis, my mother's name was Davis—one was a gentleman, the other a beggar-girl. I have as much or as little right to one as to the other. Let your friend sue for a divorce, the law will not give it him.'"

"Too true; the law will not. Our divorce law is—"

"An inefficient, insufficient, cruel farce," said Sabretasche, more energetically than I had ever heard him say anything in his life. "In an infatuated hour a man saddles himself with a she-devil like the Trefusis—a liar, a drunkard, a mad woman; what redress is there for him? None. All his life through he must drag on the same clog; fettering all his energies, crushing out all his hopes, chaining down his very life, festering at his very heart-strings. There, at his hearth, must sit the embodied curse—there, in his home, it must dwell—there, at his side, it must be, till God release him from it!"

I looked up at him in surprise, it was so very unusual to see him so warm about anything. He took up his hookah again and pointed to a marble statuette—one of his own chipping, by the way—on which the fire-light was gleaming.

"Look at that little Venus Anadyomene, Arthur, with the fire-light shining on her; quite Rembrandtesque, isn't it? I'll paint it so to-morrow."

"Do, and give the picture to Violet Molyneux. But apropos of your remarks, how would you redress the divorce shortcomings? If you divorce for insanity, every husband sick of his wife can get a certificate of lunacy against her. If for drunkenness, what woman will be safe from having

drams innumerable sworn against her? If for incompatibility of temper, after every little temporary quarrel scores would fly to the divorce courts, and be heartily sorry for it after. Come, how would you redress it?"

"My dear fellow," said Sabretasche, languidly, "I'm not in parliament, thank Heaven for it; for, if I were, my conscience would be always pricking me to try and introduce a little liberal feeling and common sense among that body and, as the operation would be of an Augean-stable character, I'm much too idle a man for it to be to my taste. You talk like a sage. *I* only feel—for poor De Vigne, I mean."

"You don't feel more for him than I, Colonel, and though it isn't the thing to execute corporeal punishment on ladies, I should have more delight in kicking that miserable, hateful Jezabel of a woman within an inch of her life, than any rapture you could bestow on me. That such a union should be legal is a disgrace to any country. At the same time, divorce seems to me, of all the niceties of legislature, the most ticklish and unsatisfactory to adjust. If you were to shut the door on divorce, there is an evil unbearable; if you open it too wide, almost as much harm may accrue. Divorces are a necessity of common sense and common peace, yet there is some sense in it, that if it be made so easy that in twelve months' time, when their fancy is faded, people can break their chains and leave one another at their will, marriage will be no longer any union of heart and mind, but a mere social compact, without interest or solemnity, and men will take a wife as they buy a horse, to turn it over to some other possessor and buy another that they fancy better."

"My dear Chevasney, you talk like a paterfamilias, a Solon of seventy, a moral machine without blood, or bones, or feelings," said Sabretasche, impatiently. "I don't care

a straw for theories, I look at facts. Put yourself in the position, Arthur, and then sit in judgment. I take it if every man had to do that, the laws would be at once wiser and more lenient; whereas now, on the contrary, it is your man who has the stolen pieces in his pocket who cries out the most vehemently for the thief to be hanged, hoping to throw off suspicion. Put yourself in the position! Now you are young and easily swayed, you fall in love—as you phrase it—with some fine figure or pretty face. Down you go headlong, never stopping to consider whether her mind is attuned to yours, her tastes in common with yours, her character such as will go well with yours in the long intercourse that takes so much to make it harmony, so little to make it discord. You marry her; the honeymoon is barely out before the bandage is off your eyes. We will suppose you see your wife in her true colors—coarse, perhaps low-bred, with not a fiber of her moral nature that is attuned to yours, not a chord in heart or mind that is in harmony with yours. She revolts all your better tastes, she checks all your warmer feelings, she debases all your higher instincts; union with her humbles you in your own eyes; contact and association with her lower your tone of thought, and imperceptibly draw you down to her own level. Your home is one ceaseless scene of pitiful jangle or of coarser violence. She makes your house a hell, she peoples your hearth with fiends; she and her children—hideous likenesses of herself—bear your own name, and make you loathe it. Perhaps you meet one the utter contrast of her, the fond ideal in your youth of what your wife was to be, one who touches all the better springs, all the higher aspirations; one in whom you realize all you might have been, all you might have done! You look on Heaven, and devils hold you back. You thirst for a higher, purer, more ennobling life, and fiends mock at you

and will not let you reach it. What escape is there for you? None but the grave! Realize this—*realize* it in all its hideous force—and you will feel how, as a prisoner lies dying for the scent of the free fresh air, while the free man sits contentedly within, so a man, happily married or not married at all, looks on the question of divorce in a very different light to a man fettered thus, with the torments of both Prometheus and Tantalus, the vulture gnawing at his vitals, the lost joys mocking him out of reach!”

His indolence was gone, his impassiveness changed to vivid earnestness; his melancholy eyes grew more mournful still, and there was a cadence in his voice, a powerful pathos, which held one spell-bound. I shuddered involuntarily.

“You draw a terrible picture, Colonel, and a true enough one, no doubt, as many men would witness if one could see into their homes and hearts. But what I want to know is, how to redress it? What Sir Cresswell Cresswell ever would, or ever could, dive into the hidden mysteries of human life, the unuttered secrets of mutual love or mutual hate? What judge could say where the blame lay; or, seeing only the surface, and hearing only the outside, weigh the just points of harmony or incompatibility, fitness or unfitness? Who can decide between man and woman? Who, seeing the little of the inner existence that is ever revealed in a law court, could judge between them? God knows, it is an awful thing for a man’s life to be cursed by a mistake of judgment, a lack of penetration, a boyish madness, a momentary passion; cursed, as you say, to the grave. For no fault he incurs a hideous punishment. But how redress it? We know how mischievously absurd the divorce mania was in Germany? How Dorothea Veit broke with the best of husbands, on the plea of want of ‘sympathy,’ and went over to Frederick Schlegel;

and how the Sensitive doctrine of which Schleiermacher was inaugurator, made it only necessary to be tied, to feel the want of being 'sympathetically matched,' and being untied again. There are, doubtless, many noble-minded, passionate-hearted, high-ambitioned men, whom it is a sin and an agony not to divorce at once from the woman chosen in an ill-judged and hasty moment, whose very lack of harmony is more torture to his fine-strung nature than far greater miseries to coarser minds. But, again, there are men far more numerous than they who would make it an excuse for their own inconstancy; who would marry then as carelessly as they flirt now, and would, as soon as a pretty face had grown stale to their eye, find out that she was a vixen, a virago, addicted to gin, or anything that suited their purpose, though she might really have every virtue under heaven. Don't you think that it is impossible, as long as human nature is so wayward, changeable, and short-sighted, or marriage numbered among our social institutions at all, to trim—as Halifax calls it—between too much liberty in it and too little?"

"Hush, hush, my good Arthur!" cried the Colonel, with a gesture of deprecation; "pray keep all that for the benches of St. Stephen's some twenty years hence; it is far too chill, sage, and rational for me to appreciate it. I prefer feeling to reasoning—always have done. Possibly, the evils might accrue that you prophesy so mathematically, but that does not at all disprove what I say, that the marriage fetters of Church and law are at times the heaviest handcuffs men can wear, heavier than those that chain the galley slave to his oar, for *he* has committed crime to justify his punishment, whereas a man tricked into marriage by an artful intrigante, or hurried into it by a mad fancy, has done no harm to any one—except himself. If you have such a taste for reason, listen to what John

Milton—that grave, calm Puritan and philosophic republican, the last man in the universe to let his passions run away with him—says on the score.” He stretched out his hand to a stand of books near him, and took out a *Tetrachordon*, bound, as all his books were, in cream-colored vellum and gold. “Hear what John Milton says: ‘Him I hold more in the way to perfection who foregoes an impious, ungodly, and discordant wedlock, to live according to peace, and love, and God’s institution in a fitter choice; than he who debars himself the happy experience of all godly, which is peaceful conversation in his family, to live a contentious and unchristian life not to be avoided; in temptations not to be lived in; only for the false keeping of a most unreal nullity, a marriage that hath no affinity with God’s intentions, a daring phantasm, a mere toy of terror; awing weak senses, to the lamentable superstition of ruining themselves, the remedy whereof God in his law vouchsafes us; which, not to dare use, he warranting, is not our perfection, but is our infirmity, our little faith, our timorous and low conceit of charity, and in them who force us to it, is their masking pride and vanity to seem holier and more circumspect than God.’ What do you say now? Can you deny the justice, the wisdom, the wide charity and reason of his arguments? It is true he was unhappy with his wife, but he was a man to speak, not from passion, but from conviction. Milton was made of that stern stuff that would cut off your right hand if it offended you. In Rome he would have been a *Virginus*, a *Cincinnatus*; in the early Christians’ days, he would have died with Stephen, endured with Paul. He is not a man like myself, who do no earthly good that I know of, who am swayed by impulse, imagination, passion—a hundred thousand things, who have never checked a wish or denied a desire, and who live simply pour m’amuser. Milton is one

of your saints and heroes, yet even he has the compassionate wisdom to see that divorce would save many a man whom an unfit union drives headlong to his ruin. He knows that it is cowardice and hypocrisy, and, as he says, a wish to seem holier and more circumspect than God, which makes your nineteenth century precisians forbid what nature and reason, the inborn bias and the acquired knowledge of human beings alike demand, and to which, if the Church and the law courts forbade freedom ever so, they would find some means to pioneer their own way. You may cage an eagle out of the sunlight, but the bird will find some road to life, and light, and liberty, or die beating his wings in hopeless effort.—Look there! Good Heavens, there is De Vigne!”

I sprang up; he rose very quickly for his usual indolent movements. In the doorway stood De Vigne, and we grasped his hands silently, none of us speaking for some minutes. The memory of that last scene in the church at Vigne was strong upon us all, and I, God bless him! loved his face too well to look on it again quite calmly after eight years' absence.

Then Sabretasche put his hand on his shoulder, and pushed him gently into an arm-chair before the fire, and said, softly and fondly as a man speaks to a woman,—

“Dear old fellow! there is no need for us to say welcome home!”

De Vigne looked up with something of his old, frank, cordial, sunny smile, though it faded almost instantly.

“No need, indeed; and *don't* say it. I know you are both glad to see me, and let us forget that we have ever been separated. Arthur, old boy, if it wouldn't sound an insult, I should tell you you were *grown*; and as for you, Sabretasche, you are not a whit altered; it is my belief you wouldn't change if you lived as long as Sue's Wan-

dering Jew. They told me at the barracks Arthur was dining with you, and so I came on straight. My luggage is still in the *Pera*, but I brought up some cheroots worth a guinea a piece, I vow. Try them, both of you. Ah, how I have wanted you two and the Dashers out in Scinde. You would have enjoyed it, Arthur, and I believe Sabretasche himself would have found a new sensation."

We saw that he wished to sweep away the past, and avoid all allusion to his own fate, and we fell in with his humor. Lounging and smoking round the fire, we tried to ignore every painful subject; though as I looked at him I found it hard work not to utter aloud a curse on the woman who had sent him into exile.

Those eight years had not passed without leaving their stamp upon him. His face had lost the glow, the bright eagerness, the rounded outline of his earlier youth: but to me, at least, it had a far higher beauty, the beauty of experience and reflection. Pale he had always been, but now the pallor was that of marble, as if the hot young blood surging through his veins had been suddenly frozen, as when the first breath of winter checks the free, warm, vehement waters in their course, and chills them into ice. The climate had hardly bronzed him at all, and his wide, white forehead was without scar or mark. The always severely delicate outline of his profile was still more clearly chiseled; his mouth was now haughty and stern; his passionate dark eyes were now searching, calm, and generally refusing all guess at the thoughts or feelings within, and the dark shadow under them, with a line or two about his lips which his black, silky moustaches did not hide, spoke of his restless spirit and unquiet fate. It was the face of a man of wayward will and strong passions, but of waywardness that had cost him dear, and of passions that were chained down and iced perhaps forever.

"You have seen good service out there, De Vigne," began Sabretasche, to lighten the gloom which malgré nous was stealing upon us. "'Pon my word we feel quite proud of you. What a lion you have been, old fellow. We grudged you intensely to the Hussars."

De Vigne smiled.

"I looked a lion because I was among puppy dogs, Sabretasche. Yes, I saw good service, not so much, though, as I should have liked. Some of it was pretty sharp work, but we dawdled a whole year away at that little miserable Calcutta court; if it had not been for pig-sticking and the tigers I should never have borne it at all, but I got no end of spears, and I found sport in the jungles a good deal more like the real thing than in the preserves here, or even on the moors. Then we went up to a hill station, where there was nobody but an old judge, purblind, and a missionary or two, who had been bankrupt shoemakers or stonemasons, and taken to dispensing grace as a means of getting a few shillings from those discerning Christians who sent them out, firmly crediting their assurances that they feel 'specially called.' There the hill deer, and the ortolans, and a tiger or two, kept us going; and then we were ordered off to have a shy at the mountain rebels, and a pleasant life we led, hunting them. They fought magnificently, I must say. Ah! by Jove!" cried De Vigne, his eyes lighting up, "there at last I really lived. The constant presence of danger, the ceaseless necessity for vigilance, the free life, the sharp service, roused me up, and gave me a zest for existence which I thought I had lost forever."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" cried the Colonel. "You will have zest enough in it by-and-by. No man on the sunny side of forty has lost what he may not regain."

"Except where one false step has murdered pride and

periled honor, has clouded all the future, formed a barrier which there is no destroying, a clog which there is no casting from us," said De Vigne, with something of that stern sadness which he had tried to throw off him. But he roused himself again. "Well, Sabretasche, what have *you* been doing all these years? Flirting, buying pictures and painting them, setting the fashion, and criticising new singers, as usual, I suppose."

"Don't talk of the years!" cried Sabretasche, lifting his eyebrows. "If I see to-morrow I shall be nine-and-thirty. It is disagreeable to grow old; one begins to doubt one's attractions."

"You are young enough," laughed De Vigne; "and yet, I don't know, it is a popular fallacy that time counts by years. One is old according to the style of one's life, not the length of it."

"I heard Violet Molyneux tell you last night, Colonel, that you were in your second youth, and the first prime of manhood. So take comfort," said I, laughing.

He smiled too.

"Poor little fool!" he muttered, under his moustaches.

"Violet Molyneux—who is she?" asked De Vigne. "That's a new name to me. Is she a child of Lord Molyneux—Jockey Jack, as we used to call him?"

"Yes," I answered; "and a lovely creature she is. She's a fresh beauty, and a new love for Sabretasche, who, from a few calls from him, and a few books from his library, and a few canters down the Ride with him, is ready to think him perfection, and worships him most devoutly, especially since she came to his studio with her mamma this morning and saw his last painting—which you must see, by the way—of Esmeralda and Djali."

"Don't crack me up, Arthur," said Sabretasche, rather impatiently. "Jockey Jack has a daughter who knows

how to talk, and sings well enough to please *me*, (two especial miracles, as you can fancy, my dear De Vigne;) but, certainly, both her tongue and her thorax do their business unusually well, and she is very lovely to boot. What have I been doing, did you say? Leading just the same life I have led for the last eighteen or twenty years. Making love to scores of women and loving none, wasting my time over marble and canvas, heading a Hyde Park campaign, or directing a Richmond fête. Caramba! one gets tired of it."

"Why lead it, then?"

"Because none are any better. Do my scientific friends, who absorb their energies in classifying a fossil, encrinite; my parliamentary friends, who concentrate their energies in bribing the Unwashed; my philanthropic friends, who hoax the public, and get hoaxed themselves by every text-quoting thief who has the knack and the tact to touch up their weak points; my literary friends, who write to line portmanteaus; my celebrated friends, who work, and wear, and toil to get heart disease and three lines in history,—do these, any of them, enjoy themselves one whit the more; or fail to say with Solomon, 'Vanity of vanities—all is vanity'? Tell me so—show me so, and I will begin their life to-morrow. Our vocation is to amuse ourselves, and slay our fellow-creatures by way of intermediate pastime; and it is as good a one, for all I can see, as any other."

"To slay our fellow-creatures!" cried De Vigne. "Come, come, put it a little more gracefully. To fight like Britons—to die for our colors. Something a little more poetic and patriotic."

"Same thing, my dear De Vigne; only the wording different!"

"You like the same life as the Cid, Colonel," said I, smiling. "To eat daintily, sleep warmly, lie on cushions

without anybody to trouble you, and kill your game when the spirit moves you."

"And love most truly, and do my duty, as far as I see it, most faithfully? No, no, Arthur, that doesn't do for me at all; it's not in my rôle."

"You'll write on the Cid's grave," said De Vigne, "as Byron on Boatswain's,

In life the firmest friend,
The first to welcome, foremost to defend."

"Yes, indeed; and like him I may add:

I never had but one, and here he lies.

The Cid," said Sabretasche, drawing the dog's ears through his hands—"the Cid is the only thing that cares for me."

"For you, the adored of all women, the cher ami of all beauties, the 'good fellow' of every man worth knowing in town!" said De Vigne. "What do you mean by only having a dog to care for you? The world would never believe you."

"I mean what I say," answered Sabretasche. "Bon Dieu! how much does the world know of any of us?"

"Little enough," said De Vigne, "but it is always of those of whom it knows least that it will affect to know most; and the stranger you sit next at a dinner-party is ten to one far better acquainted with your business than you are yourself."

"Ah! isn't he?" said I. "That reminds me, Sabretasche, I heard from three different ladies the other day that you were engaged to Valencia Prie-Dieu, that you were certainly going to be married to Fanella de Vaux; and thirdly, that you, without the slightest doubt, were going to elope with Ascott's wife. I believe they mentioned the hour, and where you were going."

"Well done for your morals, Sabretasche," laughed De Vigne; "three women on your hands at the same time! How will you manage them all?"

"Good Heavens!" cried the Colonel, laughing. "Commend me to the ingenuity of women! With Val Prie-Dieu I danced twice at Almack's, and that's all, for she hasn't two ideas, and I never waste my time on a stupid woman; no coiffure can make up to me for lack of brain under it. Miss de Vaux, I don't think I know; I have a dim recollection of staying last autumn in the same house with a hideous large-boned filly of a girl, who went by that name. With my Lady Ascott, I plead guilty to mild flirtation; but, as she has red hair, is the most prudent of women, and Ascott is one of my best friends, and has many a time confided to me how thankful he would be to any Don Juan that rid him of his better-half, I should be about as likely to elope with your new mare. Fancy my supporting life, for a week only, in the proximity of red hair!"

"Then I may contradict the statements?"

"No. I never honor reports by denying them."

"Quite right," said De Vigne; "they die quickest of inanition. Feed them with denial, they thrive apace; neglect them, they perish of chagrin. We shall hear you are to marry—what is her name?—Violet Molyneux next?"

"Not I," said Sabretasche; "at least you may *hear* it, but I shall live and die as I am now—alone!"

"Who would care for reports?" said De Vigne, breaking off the ash of his cheroot; "the whispers of idle mischief or industrious malice. For my part, I can as soon imagine a man taking heed of every tuft of dandelion that passes him in the air, or every petty insect that crawls beneath his feet, as taking note of the reports that buzz round his career. If they are false, of course he can afford to laugh

at them; if true, why the judgment of society is not so infallible that we must needs bow to it, but, quite the contrary, it is most apt to err: it judges from the outside, in utter ignorance of the motive powers and springs within. The purity of a whitened sepulcher may attract it—the errors and weaknesses of a warm and noble nature may win its unjust censure. It is always ready to condemn, never ready to extenuate; and those whom it ostracizes are often worth the most. Opinion decreed David and Brutus fools; Eldon a profligate; Columbus a dreamer and blasphemer; Leibnitz, Sheridan, Washington Irving, and a host of others, dunderheads. Report has never yet been a true index to merit; and I should as soon dream of heeding the purposeless buzz of flies on a midsummer day as the venom and gossip with which petty natures seek to sting one. Bah! how I hate all those pettesses and turmoils, those pitiful wheels within wheels, those arrows, hit for so trifling a vengeance yet barbed with such a poisoned head, those lowering jealousies and meannesses, that debasing atmosphere of scandals, and envies, and detractions, that spoil social life. Out campaigning, one is free from all that. It is action, it is reality; before the cannon's mouth men cannot stop to split straws; and with one's own life on a thread, one cannot stop to stoop and ruin another's character. I do not know how it is. I have read pretty widely, but philosophers never preached endurance to me as well as the grand eternal calm of nature, nor sermons humbled me like the sense of my own insignificance as I lay under the great cathedral of the sky, with its multitudinous worlds rolling on and on in their changeless course. A few months ago I was camping out to net ortolans; the night was so still, so clear! What night is like a tropical one! Round us was the dense stretch of the forests and jungles—no wind stirring the great palm

groves—no sound, except the cry of the hill deer, or the deep voice of a tiger far away—there was nothing stirring, except now and then an antelope flitting like a ghost across the clearing, and, over it all, those dark blue skies with the intense brilliance of the southern stars. On my life, as I lay there by our watch-fire alone, with my pipe, it struck me that, if we would let her, Nature would be a truer teacher than theories or homilies. Human life seems so small beside the vast life of universal creation. The calm grand silence of the worlds going on in their noiseless path rebukes our own feverishness, our fretful passions, our ambitions, so arrogant, and yet so petty. We who fancy that the eyes of all the universe are on us, that we are the sole love and charge of its Creator, feel what ephemera we are in the giant scale of existence; what countless myriads of such as we have been swept from their place out of sight, and not a law of the spheres around been stirred, not a moment's pause been caused in the silent march of creation. Under men's tutelage I grow impatient and irritated. What gage have I that they know one bit better than I? They rouse me into questioning their dogmas, into penetrating their mysteries, into searching out and proving the nullity of the truths they assume for granted; but under the teaching of Nature I am silent. I recognize my own inferiority. I grow ashamed of my own weaknesses, my pride, my lack of charity and tolerance. Have not you often felt the same?"

"Yes," answered Sabretasche. "A wayside flower, a sunny savanna, a rose-hued Mediterranean sunrise, even a little bit of lichen on a stone in the Campagna, has taught one truer lessons than are taught in the forum or the pulpit. Man sees so little of his fellow-man; he is so ready to condemn, so slow to sympathize with him, that, if he attempt to teach, he is far more apt to irritate than aid; whereas,

to the voices of flowers, and sunlight, and midnight stars, the bluntest sense can hardly fail to listen, and they speak in a universal tongue, whose cadence is translatable alike to the Indian in his primeval woods and the civilized savant in his scientific study."

"But one is apt to lose sight of Nature in the hurry and conflict of actual every-day social life. Standing alone under the shadow of the Alps, a man learns and feels his own utter insignificance; but back again in the world, the first line of a favorable review, the first hurrah of an admiring constituency, the first applause that feeds his ear in the world he lives in, will give him back his self-appreciation, and he will find it hard not to take himself at the high gauge that others take him, and not to fancy himself of the importance to the universe that he naturally is to the clique to which he belongs. That is partly why I was unwilling to leave campaigning. There the jungle and the stars took me in hand, and there, many a night by my camp-fire, with my cheroot or my pipe in my mouth, I would listen to them, though God knows whether I am the better for it. Here, on the contrary, men will be prating at me, and I shall chafe at them, and it will be a wonder if I do not kick out at some of them. I am impatient, you know; my guerrilla life suited me better than my fashionable one."

"You are too good for it all the same," said Sabretasche; "and if you should put the kicking process into execution, it will be a little wholesome chastisement for them, and a little sanitary exertion for you. Jungles and planets are grander and truer, sans doute, but Johannisberger and society are equally good for men in their way, and, besides—they are very pleasant!"

"Your acme of praise, Sabretasche," laughed De Vigne. "I agree with you that human nature is, after all, the best

book we can learn, only the study is irritating, and one sees so much en noir there, that if we look too long we are apt to spoil our eyes for daylight, or to fling away our lexicon, with a curse upon it for deceiving us."

"The best way, after all," said the Colonel, with a cross between a yawn and a sigh, "is not to take it au sérieux, or make anything a study. Men and women are marionettes; the best way is to learn the tricks of their wires and strings, and make them perform, at our will, tragedy, comedy, farce, whatever pleases our mood. To be sure, one sometimes has a penalty to pay for learning to manage the puppets, as Charles Nodier found when he was taught to make Polichinelle talk upon the Boulevards; but human life is a kaleidoscope, with which the wise man amuses himself; it has pretty pictures for the eye, if you know how to shake them up, and as for analyzing it, pulling it to pieces for being only bits of cork and burnt glass, and quarreling with it for being trumpery instead of bonâ fide brilliants—cui bono?—you won't make it any better."

"Possibly; but I shall not be taken in by it."

"My dear fellow, I think the time when we *are* taken in by it is the happiest part of our lives."

"Maybe. His drum is no pleasure to a boy after he has broken it, and found the music is empty wind, with no mystery about it whatever. I say, what is your clock? Am I not keeping you fellows from some engagement or other?"

"None at all," answered Sabretasche, "and you will just sit where you are for the next four hours. Give me another cheroot, and take some more cognac: it is the true thing; I brought it from France myself. Is it likely we shall let you off early after an eight years' absence?"

We did not let him off early; and all the small hours had chimed before we had done talking over our cheroots,

with the fire burning brightly in the Colonel's luxurious room, and the Cid lying full-length between us, with his muzzle between his fore-pads, while De Vigne told us tales of his Indian campaign that roused even tired and listless Sabretasche, and fired my blood like the war-note of Boot and the Long Roll, or the trumpet-call of Saddle!



PART THE EIGHTH.

I.

SABRETASCHE, HAVING MOWED DOWN MANY FLOWERS, DETERMINES TO SPARE ONE VIOLET.

FROM the hour he left her in the vestry at Vigne church, De Vigne had never seen the woman who, by law, stood branded as his wife. His fiery love changed into most bitter loathing, and the hate wherewith he hated her was far greater than the love wherewith he had loved her. How could it be otherwise? How could any man so fiery in his impulses, so vehement in his passions, change to anything but deadliest hate toward the woman who had outwitted and entrapped him, outraged his honor, shivered his pride, insulted him so openly, revenged herself so cruelly, and shaped her vengeance in a form which would press upon him a dead and ice-cold weight to his grave—which would strike from his path all the natural joys and aspirations that bloom so brightly for a man so young, and stretch over his whole existence a shadow all the blacker than its giant upas-tree sprang from the forgotten seed of a boyish folly? He left her at the church, and swore never to touch even her hand again. Passion changed to ab-

horrence, and the girl who had charmed and intoxicated him in his boyhood with the simply sensuous beauties of face and form, filled him only with loathing and disgust when he thought of her bearing his own name, holding his own honor; when he saw her—coarse, cruel, ill born, ill bred, the pollution of her past life vainly covered with the varnish of society, the mud of the gutter gleaming hideously through the cosmetique of the actress; the vulgar vengefulness of her original nature standing out in its true colors; every taste of hers alien to his; every chord of her mind and thoughts at discord with his own; all the coarse attractions that had once charmed him so madly now revolting him from her;—and seeing her thus, knew that till one or other was in the grave this woman was his WIFE. Remorse, too, was added to the curse of his marriage. His mother, who loved him so tenderly, whom he loved so well—the one friend on whom he could rely, the one adviser in whom he, reserved and impatient of control, was alone able to confide—his mother had died of that fatal blow which struck at the root of her son's peace and honor. She had been for some years a victim of heart disease, though she had never allowed De Vigne to be told of the frail tenure on which she held her life; that any sudden emotion or over-excitement might at any time be her death-blow, was only known to herself and her physician, and she kept her secret with that silent heroism of which here and there women are found capable. As De Vigne left the church, Sabretasche lifted her up in what he believed to be a fainting fit, but it was a swoon, from which she never awoke, and her son was left to bear his curse alone.

I have seen men writhing in their death agony, I have seen women stretched across the lifeless body of their lover on the battle-field where he fell, I have seen the anguish,

and the torture of human souls cooped up by shoals in hospital sick-wards, I have seen mortal suffering in almost all its phases—and they are varied and pitiful enough, God knows!—but I never saw any so silent and yet so terrible as De Vigne's, when we hurried after him up to town to tell him of his double grief. When we found him, the Trefusis's revenge had done its work upon him; lengthened years would not have quenched the life, and light, and youth, as the remorse, the humiliation, the conflicting passions at war within him had already done. The tidings we brought crowned the anguish that had entered into his life. On my life, gently as Sabretasche broke it to him, I thought it would have killed him. His lips turned gray as stone, he staggered like a drunken man, and would have fallen where he stood if I had not held him up.

“My God! and I have murdered her!”—That was all he said. Under what anguish his strong heart reeled, and his iron pride bowed in his night watches beside the lifeless form of the mother whose love for him had killed her, no one knew. He was alone in his passionate and unspoken sorrow, and I could only guess by my knowledge of him how bitterly his deep affections suffered, how wildly he cursed the wayward passions that had wrought his ruin, how long and silently the vulture of remorse gnawed his heart away, with the haunting memory of his folly and its fruit.

He laid his mother under one of the giant elms of Vigne, with violets and lilies growing over her pure white headstone; and, but for the high courage and strong manhood in him, would have loaded one of his pistols and been buried there beside her, so bitter was his anguish at the mad, headstrong passion which had given the death-blow to her life and his own peace.

A month afterward he exchanged into the —th Hussars

and sailed for Scinde. He saw none of his old companions and acquaintance, save the Colonel and myself; he shunned all who had been witnesses of his marriage, all who knew of the stain upon his name, all who had even heard of the folly into which his own wayward will had hurried him. It is easy to bear the contempt and censure of the world when we are happy, and defiance of its laws brings fame or rapture; but its sneer and its supercilious smiles may be hard even to a brave man to bear, when the world has cause to call him fool, when it can triumph in vaunting its own superior penetration, in recalling its own wise prophecies of his fall, and in compelling him to make the most difficult of all confessions to a proud heart—"I was wrong!"

De Vigne sailed for India, the hand of his double sorrow heavy upon him. He commissioned Sabretasche to make arrangements with the Trefusis, but all that the Colonel, consummate man of the world though he was, could do, was to exact that she should receive an allowance of three thousand a year, (if she would have demanded less, which I do not suppose she would, old Fantyre, who was eternally at her elbow, would not have permitted her,) on condition that she never came to England. The Trefusis accepted it, possibly because she knew the law would not give her so much, and went to Paris and the Bads, leading a pleasant life enough, I doubt not, but careful to make it far too proper a one—outwardly, at the least—to give him any chance of a divorce. Separated from him at the church, she was still legally his wife, and she printed "Mrs. De Vigne" on her cards, and held herself as such. By what miracle of metamorphosis, by what agency, assistance, or wonderful self-education Lucy Davis had been enabled to change herself into Constance Trefusis, we knew not then, nor till long afterward. That De Vigne had not recognized in the haughty and handsome protégée of Lady Fantyre

the forward young milliner of Frestonhills, who had almost entirely slipped from his memory, was not astonishing. In those eight years the unformed girl of seventeen had changed into the maturer and finer beauty of five-and-twenty: she had grown taller, her form had developed, fashion, dress, and taste lent her beauty a thousand aids unknown to her in her earlier days of mingled boldness and gaucherie. It was not wonderful that, having forgotten Lucy Davis, and almost all connected with her, in the rapid whirl of life into which he had plunged, and the different loves which had chased themselves in and out of his wayward fancy, he should fail to recognize her as Constance Trefusis, in so utterly different a sphere, so entirely altered in feature, manner, appearance, that not a single trace remained to recall her to him; though how she had so metamorphosed herself I used to think over in amazement many and many a time, never able to find out a solution.

De Vigne returned home to resume the social life he had so suddenly snapped asunder. To careless eyes he was much the same; as amusing a companion at the mess-table; as keen-sighted and witty a talker in that most fastidious of circles, the clubs; as admired by women, despite that his admiration of them had merged into sarcasm at and indifference to them; but *I* felt that the whole man in him was changed. Reserved, skeptical of all truth and of all worth, his generous trust changed to chill suspicion, his fiery impetuosity chained down under a semblance of icy firmness, his strong passions held down under an iron curb, the treachery of which he had been the victim seemed to have wholly altered his frank, warm, cordial nature. He was fond of Curly (who had just changed from the Coldstreams to the lieutenant-colonelcy of the —th Fusiliers, as lazy, sweet-tempered, fair-haired a young Adonis as ever) from

early association; he liked me; he liked Sabretasche immensely; he liked as acquaintances several men and one or two women, but to rouse any more cordial feeling, to interest him more warmly, seemed impossible; in truth, the future was a blank to him, for though he would not have allowed it, and possibly did not know it, De Vigne was not a man to live without sympathy or affection, and the unconscious thirst to be loved and understood made a void in him which he felt, though he guessed not its cause.

"The fact is," said Curly to me, as we were riding down Piccadilly to the Park, "both the Colonel and De Vigne have done themselves up too soon. They go on in that kill joy nil admirari system till they take no pleasure in anything. I'm blasé enough, goodness knows, and some things bore me infernally; but there is plenty of fun in life if you only go the way to work to find it. De Vigne, poor fellow! is as frozen up by this confounded miserable *més-alliance* as the ships in the Arctic Seas. It will take some tremendous impetus, some wonderful force, to thaw him out of it again. It would do him a world of good to fall in love again, but he won't, the Marble Arch would be as easy to ignite; and then if it were with a girl in his own rank, which it would be, as he'd be dead certain to take the exact contrary to the *Trefusis*, there would be the very devil to pay, wouldn't there? Ah, by Jove, here he is! Beautiful creature, that mare of his is—three parts thorough-bred; and just look at her wild eye. How are you, De Vigne? My dear fellow, how religious you make me every time I come across you! I pronounce a *Benedicite* on the Horse Guards for ordering the —th home!"

"Very kind of you, Curly," laughed De Vigne, "but I'm not sure I re-echo your thanksgiving. A gallop in the cool night through the jungle is preferable to pacing up and down the Ride yonder."

“Wait till the Ride’s full,” replied Curly, “with all the gouty wits, and the dandy politicians, and the amazoned belles, and the intensely got-up stockbrokers, and the immensely showy livery-stable hacks, who would go so delightfully if they weren’t, par hasard, broken-winded, or knock-kneed by way of change. Wait till the season, my good fellow—till you drink Seltzer as thirstily as a tired hound drinks water, till you spend the sweet hours of the summer nights crushed up on the stairs of Eaton Square or May Fair, till you waste a couple of hundred giving a Clarendon dinner to men and women who, having eaten your Strasbourg pâtés, drive away to demolish your character—wait till the season, and *then* you’ll admit the superiority of enjoyment to be found in town instead of in campaigning. There’s nobody in town worth seeing yet, except, indeed, Violet Molyneux.”

“Whom I have not seen,” said De Vigne; “but I will go and call there—Lowndes Square, isn’t it?—for I used to know her mother very well; an eminently religious flirt, I remember, who made an assignation one day and prayed for forgiveness for it at vespers the next evening. I have a curiosity to see this young lady, because she has Sabretasche’s good word.”

“A good word, by-the-by,” laughed Curly, “that’s apt to do them as much damage in one way as his condemnation does in another. He has begun to go about Violet, in his soft way, as he’s gone about after hundreds of women, just for all the world as one of those beautiful boa-constrictors uncurls itself from a tree, and hovers over a poor little bird and fascinates it up to its death. She little knows what a desperate Lothario he is. I wonder if he’ll ever marry?”

“I wonder if you’ll ever hang yourself, Curly?” said De Vigne, dryly. “Neither you nor he will do either as long

as you are sane; but both of you may become candidates or Hanwell before you die, for anything I can tell."

"Oh! I hope not," cried Curly, piteously. "They'll cut off my hair, you know, and, like Samson, my strength (of conquest) lies in my locks, and my Delilahs wouldn't look at me without them. I'm one of the best-looking men in the service, but can't stand your statuesque style. There's nothing so telling for features that can bear it, but very few men's can, you know."

"Good Heavens! Curly, hold your tongue," cried De Vigne. "I cut my hair for comfort, not for effect, thank God!"

"Well, it *has* effect, if you don't," persisted Curly, who, according to his own account, gave four hours a day to his morning toilette. "I say, shall we go and call on the Molyneux now? May as well, eh? There's no news in the papers, and there's sure to be nobody decent in the Park."

"Comme vous voudrez?" said De Vigne, turning round his mare's head. "I think morning calls one of our greatest social evils, for they fritter more time away than they're worth; and just when you have got into a full swing of a little better discourse, it is time to give place to somebody else and make your exit."

"I, au contraire, think them unspeakably pleasant," responded Curly. "It kills the hour, (not but that is one of Sabretasche's difficulties, never of mine;) you learn all the news, you enjoy the luxury of hearing one best friend scandalize and cut up another of your dear acquaintances; and you can win Lady A.'s love for life by revealing to her the strictly private secret Mrs. B. has just confided to you, under a solemn seal of silence, relative to Miss C. Bless you, my dear fellow, society wouldn't half go on; there wouldn't be a tithe of the on dits sown that are necessary to the welfare and comfort of society, if it were not for that blessed institution of morning calls."

"That reminds me," said De Vigne; "yesterday, when I was calling on the Bovilles, (they are a detestable set, but Ned Boville, of the Artillery, asked me to see his family when I came home, and tell them about him,) I was sitting in the inner drawing-room, chatting with Madame, when Crowndiamonds's tilbury drove up. The two girls thought nobody was in the back room as they sat in the front—they had that moment come in from riding—and the elder sister whispered to the little one, who goes in for the kitten style and does it very badly, 'Fanny, there's Lord Crowndiamonds; go and be doing something interesting.' Whereupon Miss Fanny started up and knelt gracefully on the hearth-rug, and began tickling a spaniel and a pup, with enchanting naïveté and sweet childish laughter, making such a delicious tableau that Crowndiamonds was quite struck, I could see, when she sprang up, looking caught, and her elder apologized for 'silly little Fanny's nonsense.'"

"How intensely good!" shouted Curly.

"Good?" said De Vigne, bitterly. "I call it intensely BAD, to see girls of eighteen and twenty such artful actresses; to know that they are bred up in such rank artificiality that every gesture is studied, every word weighed, every action that looks natural, or frank, or fresh, has been prearranged beforehand, to look interesting and trap the unwary. They cry out that the nineteenth century men have lost all the strong stuff that made 'Pro patria' the rallying cry of the Greeks and Romans, that made Socrates choose death rather than the dishonor of flight, and the Gracchi stand till now synonyms of perfect manhood. I don't think we have; but if we had it would scarcely be matter of wonder, when women like these, fed on artifice, cramped with conventionality, and taught politic lies from

their cradles, are the English wives, and mothers, and sisters whom it is British custom to hold up as profitable standards and wholesome reproofs to the rest of European ladies!"

"The root of it is, as I read somewhere or other," said Curly, "that there are no girls now, they are all young ladies."

"As like one another," said De Vigne, "as the hips and haws on the hedges, or the links in my Albert chain. Educated within the stiff chevaux-de-frise of etiquette, they are taught to repress every natural demonstration or feeling, and to follow one another in Indian file along the same narrow and beaten track. They are all formed alike in one artificial mould, all educated alike in the same clap-trap and superficiality. Pretty heads, with nothing in them; pretty hands, that can at best snip out broderie; pretty voices, that lisp out 'Yes' and 'No,' agree with the last speaker, if he be also the most eligible match, and dare enunciate no opinion of their own. They give plenty for the eye, not a grain for the mind; and the heart may look forever before it finds any food in their affections, measured by a foot-rule, and limited by what is 'womanly,' *i.e.*, frozen and conventional. They are ironed down into one unaffected surface, which no natural impulse must ever venture to crumple or disturb; and where a girl dares to be frank, and free, and true, her sisterhood forthwith stone her, and decree her 'bold' and 'forward.' The few good-hearted ones make constant wives and patient mothers, but in those few chained to the follies of their drawing-room, or the dull domesticities of their nursery, what man finds a companion? And if he ever look for anything in them to think his thoughts, to sympathize in his graver studies, to help him on his better road; to comprehend, to refine, to exalt his intellect, or his aims, God help him!"

"Ah," said Curly, "if ever I should meet with that dear

little thing you mention, who would dare to emancipate herself, and be demonstrative and unartificial, I'm perfectly certain I should fall in love with her, and therefore I do hope and trust I may never come across the miracle, for it is a horrid bore to be in love; I infinitely prefer receiving unlimited worship as I do now, and giving no more than just warms me up agreeably."

"Don't come in here, then, Curly," said I, as we turned into Lowndes Square, "for, according to report, the Hon. Vy is both demonstrative and unartificial."

"That is to say, an actress a little better up in her rôle than her compeers, who, like Rachel, has the superior skill to make art seem nature," said De Vigne, with a dash of that bitterness which lay hidden under his courteous calm or his witty jest; sure result of deception and treachery on an originally frank and unsuspecting nature.

Lady Molyneux was at home, a rare thing for that restless mosaic of religion and fashion, of decided "ton" and pronounced "piety;" and at home we found her, chatting with one of her beloved spiritual brothers, the Bishop of Campanile, a most pleasant bon viveur, by no means a Saint Anthony on the score of earthly temptations, while in a low chair, exquisitely dressed, (I confess to a weakness for pretty toilettes for ladies, beauty unadorned, &c. is bosh and twaddle,) her radiant eyes sparkling, her graceful figure and her lovely face all instinct with life and animation, sat Violet Molyneux talking to Sabretasche, who was listening to her with an air of half indolent amusement, and magnetizing her with the soft, lustrous gaze of his mournful eyes, that had wound their way into so many women's love.

Lady Molyneux welcomed us all charmingly. She was quite made of milk of roses, that dear woman; there was a shadow of impatience in her daughter's tell-tale eyes at

having her talk interrupted, but of course she was too much of a lady to show it, and the Colonel, who had a wonderful knack of monopolizing a woman quietly, did not give up his seat, and soon resumed his discussion with her, which it seems was on the poets of the present day; no very promising theme, you will say, as those gentlemen are more provocative of Billingsgate anathemas, generally speaking, than of anything else.

"What do you think of the 'Ideals of the Lotus and the Lily?'" asked Violet of De Vigne, referring to the book they were discussing, the last wild-brained and mystical nonsense that had issued from the imaginations of the pet rhymers of the day.

"I cannot say I think much," smiled De Vigne. "To read that man's works one wants a dictionary of all his unintelligible jargon, his 'double-barreled adjectives,' his purposely obscured meanings. I suppose he fancies *chi-ar'oscuro* the best tone for paintings, that he draws his word-pictures in such densely dark style that our eyes have to grow, cat-like, used to the *demi-lumière* before we can even guess at the meaning of the shapes that lie groveling in it, which, when we do drag them up into daylight, turn out voiceless and valueless shadows not worth the disemboweling."

"All that is treason here, De Vigne," said Sabretasche, with a mischievous smile. "Miss Molyneux is the patron and champion of everything visionary, high-wrought, and unintelligible to us ordinary mortals."

"*Comme vous me taquinez!*" cried Violet, indignantly. She was by this time wonderfully good friends with the Colonel. "I don't think any more than you do that everybody who dashes down the phantasies of his seething brain has a right to consider himself a poet, nor that every lover who scribbles a few halting stanzas to his airy

fairy Lilian has a right to consider himself as one of the elect of genius."

"Just so; boys learn the poetry of the day because it helps them to write their love-letters, and vaunts the mystical and misunderstood sorrows on which young fellows in the Werther period of life are so fond of pluming themselves," said De Vigne. "The polite 'go to the deuce!' these new rhymesters say to everybody not exactly their own way of thinking; the way in which they curse in dithyrambics all who indulge in the luxury of a little common sense, are what irritate me. They waste in tears and rhymes the hours they should give to study and reverent analysis of greater minds that have come and gone before them. They complain of themselves as martyrs to the world's neglect, when they have not done a single thing to attract the world's applause. Yet these raving individuals, 'sad only for wantonness,' strangely please dreamy young ladies and gentlemen ignorant of the true meaning, sorrows, and burdens of this 'work-a-day world.'"

Violet made him a graceful *révérence*.

"Thank you. Is that a hit at me? It does not strike home, if it is, because my worst enemies could never say I was dreamy, though they may call me—what is it, high-wrought?" And she glanced at Sabretasche, who gave it back with as tender and a more earnest look than even he, faithless Lauzun though he was, often gave women. "But you philosophers forget," went on the young lady, energetically, "that feeling—romance, as you are pleased to call it—has been the germ and nurse of all great writers. The swan must suffer before it sings. Did not his child love inspire Dante? The eyes of Beatrice were the guiding stars of his genius. Would Petrarch have been all he is but for the '*amore veementissimo ma unico ed onesto*?' Did not his passion for Mary Chaworth have its influence

for life upon the character and the writings of Byron? And was not Leonora d'Este to Tasso what Diana's kiss was to Endymion?"

"And was not the domestic misery of Milton's married life the inspiration of that glorious tirade upon women in Adam's magnificent speech?" asked Sabretasche, mischievously; "and but for Anne Hathaway, might we have ever had that fiery oration of Posthumus:

Even to vice
They are not constant; but are changing still
One vice, but of a minute old, for one
Not half so old as that?"

"Some better woman, then, monsieur, taught him," cried Violet, hotly, "that from women's eyes

Sparkles still the right Promethean fire.
They are the books, the arts, the academes
That show, contain, and nourish all the world."

Sabretasche bowed his head in acknowledgment of defeat.

"You have conquered me, as Rosaline conquered Byron!"

He said the words as he had said such things to scores of women as lovely as Violet Molyneux; from anybody else she would have taken them at their value; at the Colonel's glance her eyes flashed and her color deepened.

"But don't you think, Miss Molyneux," suggested De Vigne, quietly, "that when Tasso languished in Ferrara dungeons, he must have wished he had never seen the Este family? Don't you fancy that Gemma Donati must have rather canceled Dante's good opinion of the beau sexe, and that his 'wife, of savage temper,' (not to mention Beatrice's infidelity to him and marriage with Simon de Bardi, which sinks her down to the usual stamp of coquet-

tish and bewitching young ladies, with enough of the paternal Portinari prudence in her to take a better match than the orphan Alighieri,) may have been bitter tonics, rather than sweet balm to his genius? And as for Byron—well! Miss Millbanks was rather a thorn in his side, wasn't she? And with all the romance in the world, I think, when he called on Mrs. Musters, he must have thought he had been rather a fool. What do you say?"

"I say, Major de Vigne," responded Violet, solemnly, "that you have not a trace, not a particle, not an infinitesimal germ of romance."

"Thank Heaven—no!" said De Vigne, with a laugh.

I doubt, though, if the laugh was heartfelt. I dare say he thought of the time when romance was hot and strong in him, and trust and faith strong too.

"I pity you then! Where I think you skeptical men err so much," said Violet, turning her brilliant eyes on Sabretasche, "is in confounding false and true, good and bad, feeling with sentiment, genius with pretension. The same lash which you use justly on the ass in a lion's skin, you use most *unjustly* on the real king of the forest, whose majesty is no usurpation, and strength no make-believe. Why at one sweep condemn the expression of unusual feeling as sentiment simply, because it is unusual? Deep feeling is rare; but it does not follow that on *that* account it is unreal. You tread on a thousand ordinary flowers—daisies, buttercups, cowslips, anemones—in an every-day walk; you snap off roses, heliotropes, magnolias, fuschias; they are all fair, all full of life; but out of all the Flora, there is only one sensitive plant that shrinks and trembles at your touch. Yet, though the sensitive plant is organized so far more tenderly, it is no artificial offspring of mechanism, but as fresh, and real, and living a thing as any of the others!"

De Vigne and Curly were chatting with Lady Molyneux, whose bishop had taken his congé. Sabretasche still sat by Violet, a little apart, playing with her Skye Cupidon's ears.

"I believe you," he said, gently; "there *are* sensitive plants, though they are very few, so fresh, and real, and fair, that it is a sin they should ever have to shiver in rude hands, and learn to bend with the world's breath. But live as long as we have, and you will know that the deep feeling of which you are thinking is never found in unison with the poetic and driveling sentiment we ridicule. Boys' sorrows vent themselves in words—men's griefs are voiceless. If ever you feel—pray God you never may, for it comes only to destroy—the fierce and far-rooted passion of vital suffering, you will find that it may sear, wither, wear out life and light, but that it will never seek solace in confidence, never *lament itself*, but rather hug its torture closer, as the Spartan child hugged the fierce wolf-fangs. You will find the difference between the fictitious sorrows which run abroad proclaiming their own wrongs, and the grief which lies next the heart night and day; and, like the iron cross of the Romish priest, eats it slowly, but none the less surely, away."

They were strange words to come from gay, brilliant, nonchalant Vivian Sabretasche! Violet looked at him in surprise, and her laughing eyes grew sad and dimmed. He had forgotten for the moment where he was; at her earnest gaze he roused himself with the faintest tinge of color on his expressive face.

"Miss Molyneux, I am going to ask you to do me a most intense kindness; would you mind singing me Hullah's 'Three Fishers?' I declare to you it has haunted me ever since I heard you sing it on Tuesday night; and it is so seldom I hear any music that is not either a pawl or a

screech—rarely, indeed, anything that *satisfies* me as your songs do.”

She sprang up joyously. “Oh yes, I will sing it if you will sing *me* those glorious Italian songs of yours. Do you know I was dreadfully afraid of singing before you first of all. Mamma told me you were so terribly fastidious, and even found fault with Jenny Lind.”

“Because I remembered Malibran. But I find no fault with you; your voice is very sweet, of a very full compass, and, with a very little more tuition, would be perfect.”

“I am so glad it pleases you!” cried the young belle. “Major De Vigne, if you have no romance, I am quite sure you cannot care for music, so I give you full leave to talk to mamma as loudly as ever you like. I am going to sing only to Colonel Sabretasche.”

Colonel Sabretasche looked half pleased, half amused at the distinction accorded to him, and followed her to the back drawing-room, where he leaned on the piano, looking down upon her, while Violet sang—sang with one of those best gifts of nature and cultivation, a clear, bell-like, melodious voice, highly tutored, and as flexible and free as the gushing song of a mavis in spring-time, telling out its gladness under the heavy hawthorn boughs. I am not sure whether her mother was best pleased or not at that musical tête-à-tête, for Sabretasche had a universal reputation as a most unscrupulous flirt, and Lady Molyneux knew his character—at least, the character given him in his circle—too well to think he was likely to be doing any more than playing with Violet as the most attractive beauty in town. But then, again, his word was almost law in all matters of taste. He could injure Violet irretrievably by a depreciating criticism, and could make her of tenfold more marketable value by an approving word, for there were numbers of men at the clubs who moulded themselves by his dictum.

So Lady Molyneux let them alone, having fully determined to marry her child either to his Grace of Regalia, a young fellow of four-and-twenty, or to Cavendish Grey, a minister and a millionaire, before the coming season was over and gone.

I don't suppose she noticed Violet drawing out a large bunch of her floral namesakes from a Bohemian glass full of them, and lifting them up for Sabretasche to scent.

"Are they not delicious? They remind me of dear old Corallyne, when I used to gather them out of the fresh damp moss. Do you know Kerry, Colonel Sabretasche? No? Oh, you should go there; it is so beautiful, with its blue lakes, and its wild mountains, and its green, fragrant woodlands."

"I should like it, I dare say," said Sabretasche, smiling, "with you for my guide. I want some added charm now to give 'greenness to the grass and glory to the flower.' Once I enjoyed them for themselves, as you do; but as one gets on in life there is too silent a rebuke in nature for us to enjoy it unrestrainedly. Is Lord Molyneux's estate in Kerry?"

"Don't call it an estate," laughed Violet; "it always amuses me so when I see it put down in the peerage. It is only miles and miles of moorland, with nothing growing on it but tangled wood and glorious wild-flowers. There are one or two cabins with inhabitants like kelpies. The house has been, perhaps, very grand when all we Irish were kings, and you Sassenachs, Roman slaves; but at the present moment, having lost three-quarters of its roof and nine-tenths of its timbers, having rats, and owls, and ghosts innumerable, no windows, and no furniture, you would probably think it more picturesque than comfortable, and feel more inclined to paint it than to live in it."

"But *you* lived in it?"

"Ah! when I was a child; but it was a little better then. There was a comfortable room or two in it, and I was very happy there with my favorite governess and my little rough pony, when papa and mamma were up here or in Paris, and left us to ourselves in Corallyne. I wonder if I shall ever be as happy as I was there?"

"You are very happy here," said Sabretasche, with a sort of pity for the joyous-hearted, fair, fresh Violet, to whom sorrow was yet but a name.

"Happy? Oh, yes; I enjoy myself, and I am always light-hearted; but I have things to annoy me here; the artifices and frivolity of the society that we are constantly in worry me. I want to say always what I think, and nobody seems to do it in the world."

"The world would be in hot water if they did. But pray speak it to me."

"I always do—I could not do otherwise," answered Violet, innocently. "Yes, I enjoy London life. I like the whirl, the excitement, the intellectual discussion, the wide-awake, vivid, *real* life men lead here. I should enjoy it entirely if I did not see too many hard, cruel, worn faces under the fair smiling masks."

"Pauvre enfant!" marmured Sabretasche. "Do you suppose there are *any* light hearts under the dominoes at a bal masqué?"

Violet looked at him earnestly:

"*Yours* is not a light one?"

"Mine!" echoed the Colonel, with a strangely melancholy intonation; then he laughed his gay soft laugh. "If it is not, mademoiselle, you are the first who had penetration enough to find it out. I am quôteur of amusement in general to all my friends. There is De Vigne going, and so must I. I shall not thank you for your songs."

"No, don't," said Violet, warmly. "I am so tired of

meaningless thanks and vapid compliments. You would not have asked me to sing if you had not wished to hear me, for I know that on principle you never bore yourself."

"Never," replied Sabretasche, in his usual indolent tone. "No one is worth such a self-sacrifice."

"Not even I?" asked Violet, saucily raising her eyebrows.

"To suppose such a case, I must first imagine you boring me, which just at present is an hypothesis *not* to be imagined by any stretch of poetic fancy," laughed Sabretasche, as he held out his hand to bid her good morning.

She held the violets up to him:

"You have forgotten the flowers?"

"May I have them?" asked Sabretasche, softly, with one of those long tender glances, in which his lengthened experience in that mysterious book, a woman's heart, had perfected him.

She gave them to him with a bright flush and smile. He slipped them hastily into the breast of his waistcoat, and came forward to Lady Molyneux.

"Violet, my love," began her mother, as the door closed on us, "Colonel Sabretasche comes here a great deal; I wish you would not be quite so—quite so—expansive with him."

"Expansive!" repeated Violet, in sheer astonishment. "What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say, my dear Violet," repeated the Viscountess, the milk of roses turning a little sour. "You treat him quite as familiarly as if he were your brother or your lover. You need not color, I don't say he *is* the last; God forbid he should be, with his principles and his well-known character! You really run after him. I know he makes himself agreeable to you, but so, as every one will tell you, he has done for the last twenty years to any pretty

woman that came across his path; and your speech to his friend De Vigne, about 'singing *only* to Colonel Sabretasche,' was not alone unmaidenly, it was absurd."

"How so?" said Miss Vy, the color hot in her cheeks. "I did not sing to the others, I only cared for him to hear it and like it."

"It was all very well for him to hear it and like it," replied my lady, irritably—prominent piety has a queer knack of souring the temper—"his extreme fastidiousness makes his good word well worth having; the best way to make your opinion of value in society is to admire nothing, as he does. But, at the same time, it is a dear way of gaining his applause to keep all other men in the background while you are flirting with him. Before you saw him you liked Regalia, and Killury, and plenty of others, well enough; now you really attend to no one else if Colonel Sabretasche chance to be in the room."

"Because I see their inferiority to him," interrupted Violet, vehemently. "Their talk is cancons, compliments, and sentiment; his is talent, intellect, and sense. All they can do is to ride, and waltz, and smoke; he has the genius of an artist, whether in painting, sculpture, or music. They think they please me by vapid flattery; he knows better. They are one's subjects, he is one's master!"

Lady Molyneux was seriously appalled by such an outburst. She raised her eyebrows sarcastically:

"You admire Vivian Sabretasche very much, Violet?"

"Yes," said Violet, fervently; "with all my soul."

"I should not advise you to say so, my dear."

"Why not? it is the truth."

"Few truths can be spoken," replied the eminently religious, fashionable lady, coldly. "Why you had better not proclaim your very Quixotic admiration for Sabretasche is, because he bears as bad a character for morality

as he bears a good one for talent and fashion. What his life has been every one knows pretty well: he is a most unprincipled libertine, and if you proclaim the interest you feel in him just because he has chatted with you, and sent you flowers, and praised your singing, you will be classed with the scores of pretty young girls whom he has made love to and left. No one ever dreams of expecting anything serious of him; he is the last man in the universe to marry, but a flirtation with him may very greatly injure your prospects——”

“Oh! mamma, pray don’t!” said Violet, with a dash of contemptuous hauteur. “I am so sick of those words; they are so lowering, so pitiful, so conventional, making a market of one’s self and one’s best affections. I cannot bear to hear you speak so. I admire Colonel Sabretasche; I could not cease to admire him for anything other people might say; and it is sacrilege to me to have a friend, yet listen to the world’s opinion of him, or discard him for anything society might whisper against him; if untrue, it is beneath both his and your attention; if true, he needs all the more your defense and your fidelity. As to his being—to his meaning—anything ‘serious,’” said Violet, with the color very hot in her bright, upraised face, “there is no question of that; he is very kind to me, his notice is honor to any one; but I would rather die than learn to look upon him as a speculation, or class him with all those foolish men who circle round me and try to buy me with their settlements. As to his life, he has led the same life as most men, probably; a little more openly, perhaps, than those more prudent may do; but you need only look in his eyes to see whether anything base or cruel can attach itself to him.”

Her mother sighed and sneered, and smiled unpleasantly.

“My love, the way you talk is too absurd, and a great deal too forward for me to condescend to argue with you. You forget yourself strangely; if you are not more quiet and circumspect you will be denounced—and very justly, too—as the worst ton. How is it possible for a girl of nineteen to judge of the character of a man of forty, a blasé man of the world, who was one of the greatest roués about town while she was a little child in the nursery? It is too ridiculous! But it is getting late; go and dress for dinner. The dear bishop, and Cavendish Grey, and Killury will dine here.”

“What a treat that girl is after the *maniérées manœuvrers* and yea-nay simpletons with which society is crowded,” thought the Colonel, as he drove his tilbury from Lowndes Square. “Poor little sensitive plant, it would be a pity my hands should touch it and wither its freshness and fairness. Vivian Sabretasche, I say, are you growing a fool? Don’t you know that the golden gates won’t open for you? You barred them yourself; you have no right to complain. Have you not been going to the bad all the days of your life? Have you not persuaded the world, ever since you have lived in it, that you are a reckless, devil-may-care Don Juan, a smasher of the entire Decalogue? Why should you now, just because you have looked into that girl’s two clear bright eyes, be trying to trick yourself and her into the idea that you possess such rare affairs as heart, and feeling, and regrets, because she, fresh to life, is innocent enough to have a taste for such nonsense? All folly—all folly! Back to your animate friends, horses and men, and your inanimate loves, chisel and palate, or you may grow a fool in your older years, as many wiser men have done before. You’ve pulled up many fair flowers in your day, you can surely leave that poor Violet in peace. Your love never did anything but harm to any woman yet.”

PART THE NINTH.

I.

HOW A PORTFOLIO WAS UPSET IN ST. JAMES'S STREET.

"OH, mamma, she is such a sweetly pretty girl, and Ashton is so abominably stupid, he must have knocked them down on purpose. Open the door, Colonel Sabretasche, and let me out. It is no use telling me not—I will!"

With which enunciation of her own self-will the Hon. Violet Molyneux sprang to the ground in the middle of St. James's Street, just opposite *the* bay-window, to the unspeakable horror of her mother, and the excessive amusement of De Vigne and Sabretasche, who were driving in the Molyneux barouche. One of the powdered, white-wanded, six-feet-high plushes that swayed to and fro at the back of the carriage, having dismounted at some order of his mistress's, had happened to push, as those noble and stately creatures are given to pushing every plebeian peripatetic, against a young girl passing on the pavement. The girl had with her a portfolio of pictures, which the abrupt rencontre with Mr. Ashton sent out of her grasp, scattering its contents to the four winds of heaven, and to jump down to apologize was the work of a second with that perfectly courteous, but, according to her mamma and her female friends, much too impulsive and unconventional young beauty the Hon. Violet, whose fatal lessons, learnt on the wild moorlands and among the fragrant woods of her beloved Corallyne, the aristocratic experiences of her single season had been sadly unable to unteach her.

“Ashton, how can you be so careless? Pick those drawings up immediately and very carefully,” said the young beauty, looking immeasurably severe and dignified. Then turning to the young girl, she apologized with her polished courtesy and her beaming smile for the accident her servant had caused, while Ashton, in disgusting violence to his own feelings, was compelled to bend his stately form, and even to so far fall from his pedestal of powdered propriety and flunkeyism grandeur as to run—yes, absolutely run—after one of the sketches, which, wafted by a little breeze that must have been that mischievous imp Puck himself, ambled gently and tantalizingly down the street, leading poor Ashton chasing after it. The young girl thanked her with as bright a smile as Violet’s, and votes were divided among the men in the club windows as to which of the two was the most charming, though the one was a fashionable belle with every adjunct of taste and dress, and the other an unprotected little thing walking with a woman-servant in St. James’s Street; an artist, probably, only she was too young, or a governess—no! she was too distinguée. She took her portfolio—by this time we in the clubs were all looking on, heartily amused, and Sabretasche and De Vigne were picking up the pictures with much more diligence than the grandiose Ashton—thanked Violet with a low graceful bow, and was passing on, when she looked up at De Vigne. Her lips parted, her eyes darkened, her face brightened with ecstatic delight. She stood still a minute, then she came back: “Sir Folko!” But De Vigne neither saw nor heard her, his foot was on the step of the barouche. Ashton shut the door with a clang, swung himself up on the footboard, and the carriage rolled away into Pall Mall.

“Violet, Violet! how you forget yourself, my love,” whispered Lady Molyneux, scandalized and horror-stricken.

"I wish you would not be quite so impulsive. All the gentlemen in White's are staring at you."

"Let them stare, mamma, dear," laughed Violet, merrily. "It is a very innocent amusement, it gives them a great deal of pleasure and does me no harm. What glorious blue eyes that girl had, and such hair—real true gold, there is no color like it. You should laud me for my magnanimity in praising another girl so pretty."

"For magnanimity in that line is not a virtue of your sex," said De Vigne.

"You cynical man! I don't see why it should not be."

"Don't you? Did you, on your honor, then, fair lady, ever speak well of a rival?"

"I never had one."

"You never could," whispered Sabretasche, bending forward to tuck the tiger-skin over her.

"But supposing you had?" persisted De Vigne.

"I hope I should be above maligning her; but I am afraid to think how I should hate her."

She spoke with such unnecessary vehemence, that her mother and De Vigne stared. Violet's eyes met the Colonel's; her color rose, and he, incongruously enough, turned his head away and sighed.

"If Miss Molyneux treats the visionary things of life so earnestly, what will she do when she comes to the realities?" laughed De Vigne.

Lady Molyneux sighed; on occasions she would play at tender maternity, but it did not sit well upon her.

"Ah! Major De Vigne, if we did not find some armor besides our own strength in our life pilgrimage, few of us women would be able to endure to the end of the *Via Dolorosa*."

"True," said De Vigne, with that sarcasm now grafted in him almost as his second nature. "Britomart soon finds

a buckler studded with the diamonds of a good dower, or stiffened with the parchment-skins of handsome settlements; and, tender and gentle as she looks, manages to go through the skirmish very unscathed by dint of the vizor she keeps down so wisely, and the sharp lance of the tongue she keeps always in rest against friend and foe."

"What thrusts of the spear you deserve, Major De Vigne; you are worse than your friend, and he is bad enough!" cried Violet, looking rather lovingly, however, on the Colonel, despite his errors. "I am sure if we women do take to lance and vizor, it is only in self-defense, for you would pierce us with your flint-headed arrows of sarcasm if you could find a hole in our armor."

"But here and there is a woman who unhorses us at once, and on whom it is a shame to draw our swords. Agnes Hotots are very rare, but when we do find them, Ringsdale is safe to go down before them," said Sabretasche, with his half-mournful, half-amused, wholly eloquent glance.

"I should think you have both of you been conquered or imprisoned some time or other by some Cynisca or Maria de Jesu, whom you cannot forgive, that makes you so bitter upon us all!" laughed Violet.

She said it in the gay innocence of her heart! De Vigne had been in India so long, she had not as yet heard his history. Both he and Sabretasche were silent. Violet instinctively felt that she had trodden on dangerous ground; but they had all of them the easy tact and calm impossibility of *dérèglement naturel* in all good society—and De Vigne laughed, though a curse would have been better in unison with his thoughts.

"Miss Molyneux, with all due deference to your sex, there are few men of our age, I fear, who, if they told you the truth, would not have to confess having found more *Blanche Armorys* and *Becky Sharpes* than *Artemisias* or *Antonia*

Flaxillas. Those warm and charming feelings with which you young ladies start fresh in life have a knack of disappearing in the atmosphere of society, as gold disappears melted and swallowed up in aqua regia."

"Will you let your pure gold be lost in De Vigne's metaphorical aqua regia?" whispered the Colonel, half smiling, half sadly, as he handed her out.

"Never!"

"You mean it now, but——Well, we shall see!" And Sabretasche led her up the steps with his low, careless laugh. "When you are Madame la Princesse d'Hautecour, or her Grace of Honiton, perhaps you will not smile so kindly on your old friends!"

She turned pale; her large eyes filled with unshed tears. She thought of the violets she had given him a few days before.

"You are unkind and unjust, Colonel Sabretasche," she said, haughtily. "What use was it pretending to wish me to tell you all I think and mean, if you disbelieve me when I do so? I thought you more kind, more true——"

"I am neither," said Sabretasche, abruptly for that ultra suave and tender squire of dames. "Ask your mamma for my character, and believe what she will tell you. I would rather you erred in thinking too ill—though that people would say is impossible—than too well of me."

"I could never think ill of you——" began Violet, vehemently.

"You would be wrong, then," said Sabretasche, so gravely, that Violet, who had only seen him a gay nonchalant man of art and fashion, was for the moment awed.

Just then her mother and De Vigne entered, and the Colonel, with his light laugh, turned round to them with some gay jest. Violet could not rally quite so quickly.

That night, at a loo party at Sabretasche's house, De

Vigne and I told the other fellows of Violet's impulsive action in St. James's Street; at which they all laughed heartily, of course, except the Colonel, who went on with his game in impassive silence.

"She's a great deal too impulsive; it's horrid bad ton," yawned little Lord Killtime, an utterly blasé gentleman of nineteen.

"I like it," said Curly. "It's a wonderful treat now-a-days to see a girl natural and pretty en même temps."

"She is very lovely, there is no doubt about that," said De Vigne. "I dare say they mean to set her up high in the market. Her mother is trying hard for Regalia."

"He's a lost man, then," said Wyndham, who had cut the Lower House and Red Tape for the lighter loves of Pam and Miss. "I never knew the Molyneux, senior, make hard running after any fellow but what she finished him, (she's retreated into the bosom of the Church now, and puts up with portly bishops and handsome popular preachers. Women often do when they get passées; the Church is not so difficile as the laity, I presume,) but ten or less years ago I vow it was dangerous to come within the signal of her fan, she'd such a clever way of setting at you, and obliging you to make love to her."

"Jockey Jack didn't care," laughed St. Lys, of the Eleventh. "Well! her daughter's no manœuvrer; she's a nice, natural, animated creature; by George, it's worth a guinea a turn to waltz with her."

"Natural!" sneered Vane Castleton, the youngest son of his Grace of Tiara, the worst of all those by no means incorruptible and very far from stainless pillars of the state, the "Castleton family." "Forward, you mean! By Heaven! I never came across so bold, off-hand, spirited a young filly."

Sabretasche looked up, anger in his languid, tired eyes.

"Permit me to differ from you, Castleton. Your remark, I must say, is as much signalized by knowledge of character and penetration as it is by delicacy and elegance of phraseology! Young fellows like Killtime *may* make such mistakes of judgment; we who know the world should be wiser."

De Vigne, sitting next him, looked up and raised his eyebrows at the Colonel's unusual interference and warmth

"Et tu, Brute?"

Sabretasche understood, and gave him an admonitory kick under the table, with the faintest of flushes on his forehead.

"Whose portrait is that, Sabretasche?" asked De Vigne, to stop Vane Castleton's tongue, pointing to a portrait over the mantel-piece in the inner drawing-room, where we were playing; the portrait of a very pretty woman, with exquisite golden hair, and a brilliant, beaming, happy face.

"My mother, when she was twenty. Didn't you know it? It was taken just before she married. I believe it was an exact likeness. I don't remember her. She was thrown from her horse, riding on the Corso, when I was a little fellow."

"It reminds me of somebody—I cannot think of whom," said De Vigne. "I beg your pardon, I take 'miss.'"

"Why will you talk through the game?" said I. "Don't you think the picture is like that girl who occasioned Violet's championship this morning? That's whom you are thinking of, I dare say."

"Who's talking now, I wonder!" said De Vigne. "Hearts trumps? I did not notice that girl; I was too amused to see Miss Molyneux. No, it is somebody else, but who, I cannot think, for the life of me."

"Nor can I help you," said Sabretasche, "for there is not a creature related to my mother living. But now

Arthur mentions it, that little girl was not unlike her; at least, I fancy she had the same colored hair; that often makes a fancied resemblance. Apropos of likenesses, there will be a very pretty picture of Lady Geraldine Ormsby in the Exhibition this year. I saw it, half finished, at Maclise's yesterday."

"Why don't you exhibit, Sabretasche?" said Wyndham. "You paint a deuced deal better than half those Fellows and Associates!"

"Bien obligé!" cried the Colonel. "I should be particularly sorry to hang up my pets off my easel to be put level with people's boots, or high above their possible vision, or—if honored with the 'second row'—be flanked by shocking red-haired pre-Raphaelite angels and staring portraits of gentlemen in militia uniform, and criticised by a crowd of would-be cognoscente and dilettante cockneys, with a catalogue in their hand and Ruskin rules in their mind, who go into ecstasies over Millias's great, glaring, wide-mouthed monstrosities, and cottage scenes with all Teniers's vulgarities and none of Teniers's redeeming talent. Exhibit my pictures? The fates forefend! Wyndham, help yourself to that Chablis, and, De Vigne, there is some of our pet Madeira. How sorry I am Madeira now grows graves instead of grapes! Nonsense! Don't any of you think of going yet. Let us sit down again for a few more rounds."

We did, and we played till the raw February dawn was growing gray in the streets, the guineas, jingling merrily in the pool, changing their owners quick as lightning, while we laughed and talked over Sabretasche's splendid wines and liqueurs—laughs that might have jarred on Violet's refined ears, and talk that might have made her young heart heavy, coming from her hero's lips. But when we were gone, and the wine carafes were emptied and the

fire burning low, the master of that exquisite Park Lane temple to Epicurus and Aristippus sat before the dying embers with his dog's head upon his knee, and thought:

"What a fool I am! With every one of the agréments of life, I am tired of it. Women, wine, cards, art, music, high play—are they all losing their enchantment for me? Are my rose-leaves beginning to lose their scent, and crumble under me? That girl—child she is to me.—has been the only one who has had penetration enough to see that the *bal masqué* has ceased its charm for me. She reads me truer than all of them. She will believe no ill of me. She almost makes me wish there were no ill for her to believe! Poor Violet! she fancies me 'kind' and 'true.' Shall she be the first woman to whom I have shown mercy, the first for whom I have renounced *self*? I have trodden down flowers enough in my path, I may surely afford to spare this single 'sensitive plant.' Cid, old boy! is your master wholly dead to generosity and honor because the world happens to say he is? No more, perhaps, than he is gay, and careless, and light-hearted, because it is the fashion to consider him so!"

That night Violet Molyneux stood before her glass, in her gossamer ball dress, just home from a ball given by the Life Guards, though it was *not* the season, after some amateur theatricals. The brilliant Irish beauty had been the belle of the room; she had had fifty bouquets sent her for it, half the men there had gone and lost their heads after her straightway, she had had more partners to solicit her than she could have written on a dozen tablets, she had waltzed delightedly and untiringly as a Willis, and Violet loved waltzing and enjoyed admiration—as all women do who are the stuff to win it, only so few confess to the very natural fact—but still, just now, she stood before her glass, and sighed, as her maid detached her bouquet de corsage.

"Mademoiselle," said her maid, as if she divined her young mistress's thoughts, "pendant la soirée cette boîte est venue pour vous de la part de Monsieur le Colonel Sabretasche. Voulez-vous que je la fasse ouvrir?"

"Non, non, Jeanne, laissez-la; je l'ouvrirai moi-même," said Violet, hastily.

As soon as Violet's disrobing was over, and her maid dismissed for the night, down on her knees she went before Sabretasche's box. She knew what it was; it was a statuette, modeled from her pet greyhound and its puppy, that the Colonel had done for her with that chisel which Violet, at the least, thought Praxiteles' could never have equaled. It was really a pretty thing in its crimson velvet and ebony box; there was not a word with it, but Violet kissed it, laughed, and could almost have cried over it. "He did remember me, then," she thought, "though he did not come to the ball."

Violet was very rapid, you see, with her conclusions, and quite as rapid with her forgiveness.

That night De Vigne and I smoked our pipes together over his fire in Grosvenor Place, where, as his troop was quartered in town, he had for the season taken a furnished house. Vigne had been shut up since his mother's death, and he rarely alluded even distantly to his ancestral home, that had been the scene of his folly and his wrongs. I do not think he could have endured to see it, much less to live in it.

"Is Sabretasche really getting épris with that bewitching Irish girl?" said I to him, as we sat smoking.

"God knows!" said De Vigne. "He was rather touchy about her, wasn't he? But that might only be for the pleasure of setting down Castleton, a temptation I don't think I could forego myself. According to his own showing he's never in love with any woman, but, most indis-

putably he makes love to almost all he comes across that are worth the exertion."

"Oh yes, he's a deuced fellow where the beaux yeux are concerned; but he might be really caught once, you know, though he's gone scathless all these years."

"Certainly," assented De Vigne; "none are so wise that they may not become fools. Socrates, when he was old, sage as he was, did not read in the same book with a woman without falling in love with her."

"You are complimentary to love! Is it invariably a folly?"

"I think so. At least, all I wish for is to keep clear of it all the rest of my life. Passion has cost me a vast deal too much for me ever willingly to yield to it again, even supposing I felt it, which I never shall."

"Why?" said I, looking at him, and thinking that if he renounced love, women would not renounce it for him.

"Need you ask? From my boyhood I was the fool of my passions. To love a woman was to win her. I stopped for no consideration, no duty, no obstacle; I let nothing come between me and my will. I was as obstinate to those who tried ever to stop me in any pursuit as I was weak and mad in yielding up my birthright at any price if I could but buy the mess of porridge on which I had for the time being set my fancy. Scores of times I did that—scores of times some worthless idol became the thing on which I staked my soul. Once I did it too often. You know how, as well as I. You need not wonder, I think, that I look on love as my worst foe, and a foe under whose iron heel I will never let myself be prostrate again. Arthur, you know my past, therefore I can say to you what I would to no other man. You know the curse of my life, but you do not know *how* it has cursed me. From the hour I left the church on my marriage-day youth was

crushed out of my heart and life. It is such eternal misery that that woman, so low-born, so low-bred, shameless, degraded, all that I *know* her to be, should bear my name, should proclaim abroad all the folly into which my reckless passions led me. Thank God I knew it when I did—thank God I left her as I did—thank God that no devils like herself were born to perpetuate my shame, and make me loathe my name because they bore it. Then you ask me if I am steeled to love! Love was the mocking Circe, the beautiful fiend, the painted syren, that lured me to my betrayal. It has changed my whole nature—the misery of that loathsome connection; it has altered what was soft in me into marble, what was warm into ice. It is not the tie I care for—of the importance of marriage I think little, of affection still less—it is the odium of knowing that she bears my name, the humiliation of remembering that twice in my life have I been fooled by her coarse, mindless, sensuous beauty, her depraved mind, her cruel heart; it is the remorse of pride sacrificed to mad self-will; the agony of feeling that my mother, the only pure, the only true, the only generous love fate ever gave me, died, murdered by my reckless passions.”

His hands clinched on the arms of his chair; a gray, ashy hue set over his face; it looked cast in dark, cold stone. It was my first glimpse of that spirit which, exorcised or invisible, in society and ordinary life, fastened relentless upon him in his hours of solitude. Passion was very far from dead in that hot, vehement, and deep-seated nature, though now it was hurled from its throne, and chained down hard, and fixed in fetters of iron by a resolute hand.

That night, too, at that same hour, in a little bed whose curtains and linen were white and pure as lilies, a young girl slept, like a rosebud lying on new-fallen snow; her

golden hair fell over her shoulders, her blue eyes were closed under their black silky lashes, a bright, happy smile was on her lips, and as she turned in her dreams she spoke unconsciously in her sleep two words—"Sir Folko!"

II.

HOW A WIFE TALKED OF HER HUSBAND.

IN a very gay and gaudy drawing-room in the Champs Elysées, in an arm-chair, with her feet on a chaufferette, in a scarlet peignoir trimmed with lace, looking a very imposing and richly-colored picture, sat the Trefusis, (such I have always called her and always shall,) none the less handsome for six years' wear in Paris life, intermixed with visits to the Bads, where she was almost as great an attraction as the green tables, and the sound of her name as great a charm as the irresistible "*Faites votre jeu, messieurs—faites votre jeu!*" a little fuller about the cheek and chin, a trifle more Junoesque in form, a little higher tinted in the carnation hue of her roses, otherwise none the worse for the eight years that had passed since she wore the orange-blossoms and the diamond ceinture, on her marriage morning in Vigne church.

She had an English paper in her hand, and was running her eye over the fashionable intelligence. Opposite to her was old Fantyre, her nose a little more hooked, her eye sharper, her rouge higher, a little more dirty, quick, witty, and detestable, than of yore; taking what she called a *demi tasse*, but which looked uncommonly like cognac uncontaminated by Mocha. They led a very pleasant life in Paris, I dare say; with the old lady's quick wits, question

able introductions, and imperturbable impudence, and the Trefusis's beauty, riches, and excessive freedom, they were pretty certain to find plenty of people to drink their champagne, play écarté, go to the Pré Catalan, and make gay parties to the Bois de Boulogne with them; and if they did not know the De Broglie, the Rochefoucauld, the Rochejacquelein, the Tintiniac, and all the great Legitimist nobles, there were plenty of others as gay and as amusing, if not as exclusive, as the grandees of the Faubourg and the Place Vendôme.

"What's the matter, my dear?" asked Lady Fantyre; "you don't look best pleased."

"I am *not* pleased," said the Trefusis, her brow dark, and her full under-lip protruded. "De Vigne is come back."

"Dear, dear! how tiresome!" cried the Fantyre; "just when you'd begun to hope he'd been killed in India. Well, that is annoying. It's a nice property to be kept out of, ain't it? But you see, my dear, strong men of his age are not good ones to be heir to, even with all the chances of war. So he's come back, is he? What for, I wonder?"

"Here it is, among the arrivals: 'Meurice's Hotel: Major De Vigne.' He is come back because he is tired of Scinde, probably. I wonder if he will come to Paris? I should like to meet him." And the Trefusis laughed, showing her white regular teeth.

"Why, my dear? To give him a dose of that absinthe, that your friend De Croquenoire killed himself with last week, because you won fifty thousand francs from him at écarté in ten nights, and then laughed at him to Anatole de Félice? No, you're too prudent to do anything of that sort. Whatever other commandments you break, my dear, it won't be the sixth, because there's a capital punishment for it," said the old lady, chuckling at the simple idea.

"You'd like to meet him, you say—I shouldn't. I don't forget his face in the vestry. Lord! how he did look! his face as white as a corpse, and as fierce as the devil's."

"Did you ever see the devil?" sneered the Trefusis.

"Yes, my dear—in a scarlet peignoir; and very well he looks in women's clothes, too," said the Fantyre, with a diabolical grin.

The Trefusis laughed too:

"*He* has found me a devil, at any rate."

"Well, yes; everybody has, I think, that has the pleasure of your acquaintance," chuckled Lady Fantyre. "But I don't think so much of your revenge, myself. What's three thousand a year out of his property? And as for not letting him marry, I think that's oftener kindness than cruelty to a man. Don't you think it would have been better to have queened it at Vigne (what a splendid place that was, to be sure! and such wines as he had!) and had an establishment in Eaton Square, and spent his forty thousand a year for him, and made yourself a London leader of fashion, and ridden over the necks of those haughty Ferrers people, (by the way, those girls didn't marry so very well after all,) and all his stiff-necked friends—that beautiful creature, Vivian Sabretasche, among 'em? What do you think, eh?"

"It might have been better for me, but it would have spoilt my revenge. He would have left me sooner or later, and as he is infinitely too proud and reserved a man to have told the world the secret of his disgrace in finding Constance Trefusis to be Lucy Davis, I should have lost the one grand sting in my vengeance—his humiliation before the world."

"Pooh, pooh! my dear, a man of fortune is never humiliated; the world's too fond of him. The sins of the fathers are only visited on the children where the children

are going down in the world." (The Fantyre might be a nasty old woman, but she spoke greater truths than most good people.) "So," continued the old lady, "you sacrificed your aggrandizement to your revenge? Not over sensible."

"You can't accuse me of often yielding to any weakness," said the Trefusis, with a look in her eye like a vicious mare. "However, my revenge is not finished yet."

"Eh? Not? What's the next act? On my word, you're a clever woman, Constance. You do my heart good."

The first time, by the way, that Lady Fantyre ever acknowledged to a heart, or the Trefusis received such a compliment.

"This. Remember, I know his nature—you do not. Some day or other De Vigne will love passionately—probably somebody in his own rank, and as utterly unlike me as possible. *Then* he will want to be free; then, indeed, he shall realize the curse of the fetters of church and law by which I hold him."

The old lady chuckled immensely over the amusing prospect:

"Very likely, my dear. It's just what they can't do that they always want to do. Tell a man wine's good for him, and forbid him water, he'd forswear his cellar, and run to the pump immediately. And if you heard that he'd fallen in love, what would you do?"

"Go to England, and put myself between her and him, as his deserted, injured, much enduring, and loving wife."

Old Fantyre drank up her coffee, and nodded approvingly.

"That's right, my dear! Play your game. Play it out; only take care to keep the honors in your own hand, and never trump your partner's card."

"Not much fear of my doing that," said the Trefusis, with a grim smile.

There was not, indeed; she marked her cards too cleverly. Yet cards marked with all the dexterity imaginable *have* been found out on occasion, and the consequences have been a very uncomfortable esclandre to the sharper who devised them.

III.

HOW WE FOUND THE LITTLE QUEEN OF THE FAIRIES IN RICHMOND PARK.

NOT content with his house in Park Lane, Sabretasche had lately bought, besides it, a place at Richmond that had belonged to a rich old Indian millionaire. It was an exquisite place, for it had been originally built and laid out by people of good taste, and the merchant had not lived long enough in it to spoil it: he had only christened it the Dilcoosha, which title, meaning Heart's Delight, and being out of the common, Sabretasche retained. It was very charming, with its gardens, more like an Arabian dream than anything I ever saw, sloping down to the Thames. It was a pet with the Colonel, and was a sort of Strawberry Hill, save that his taste was much more symmetrical and graceful than Horace's; and he spent plenty of both time and money, touching it up and perfecting it till it was beautiful in its way as Luciennes. De Vigne and I drove down one morning to the Dilcoosha, toward the end of February, to see the paces tried, on a level bit of grass-land outside the grounds, of a beautiful chestnut Sabretasche had entered for the Ascot Cup, and rechristened, with Violet Molyneux's permission, "La Violette." Stable slang and the delights of "ossy men" were

not refined enough for the Colonel's taste, but he liked to keep a good racing stud; he liked his horses to run, because it gave him an interest and excitement in the race, and he wished to have De Vigne's opinion of La Violette, for De Vigne, who loved horseflesh cordially, was one of the best judges of it, and one of the surest prophets of success or failure that ever talked over a coming Derby on a Sunday afternoon at Tattersall's.

So De Vigne and I agreed to lunch with him at Richmond, one morning, and after parade De Vigne drove down his mail-phaeton, picked me up in Kensington, and we bowled along the road to the Dilcoosha at a spanking pace, he handling the ribbons of a splendid pair of grays—not the Cupid and Psyche he had driven tandem to the Strand to see old Boughton Tressillian nearly nine years before, but first-rate goers—who tooled us along at ten miles an hour, while a great bull-dog, a new purchase of De Vigne's, as savage a creature as I ever beheld, and for that reason no favorite with his master, tore along beside us in the whirlwind of dust raised by the grays and the phaeton.

“What trick do you think my man Harris served me yesterday?” said De Vigne, as we came near Richmond.

“Harris—that good-natured fellow? What has he done.”

“Cut and run with a dozen of my shirts, three morning and two dress coats—in fact, a complete wardrobe, and twenty pounds or so—I really forget how much exactly—that I had left on the dressing-table when I went to mess last night. And that man I took out of actual starvation at Bombay, have forgiven him fifty odd peccadilloes, let him off when I found him taking a case of my sherry, because he blubbered and said it was for his mother, found up the poor old woman, who *wasn't* a myth, and wrote to

Stevens at Vigne to give her an almshouse, and then this fellow walks off with fifty pounds' worth of my goods! And you talk to me of people's gratitude! Bah! How can you have the face, Arthur, to ask me to admire human nature?"

"I don't ask you to admire it—Heaven forefend!—I don't like it well enough myself. What a confounded rascal! 'Pon my life there seems a fate in your seeing the dark side of humanity."

"The *dark* side? Where's any other? I never found any gratitude yet, and I don't expect any. People court you while you're of use to them; when you are not, you may go hang. Indeed, they will help to swing you off the stage, to lessen their own sense of obligation."

"But I swear," I exclaimed, wrathfully, "that everybody seems eternally bent on doing you wrong. You do them kindnesses and get no thanks. I give you leave to be as skeptical as you choose; you have full warrant."

"I should say so. My old cockatoo is the only thing faithful to me," said De Vigne, with a laugh, "and he'd go, I dare say, to anybody who offered him a larger piece of fruit or butter. Poor old Cocky! there's no reason why he should be better than the grand, highly-cultured, spiritual 'genus homo,' who are so fond of claiming affinity with the angels and of looking down on him as a very inferior creation. Yes, Harris cut and run; it's rather fun to me he did it so cleverly; it's intensely amusing to spy out all these people's little arts and machineries. He packed the things quietly in my valise when I was gone to mess, told the other servants the Major was going to the north for salmon-fishing with Colonel Sabretasche, and wished his things to be taken to the station; had a cab hailed, and drove off, telling them he and the Major should be back in a fortnight at most. Wasn't it a good idea?

There's one thing, I've a much cleverer fellow in his stead, so I am rather a gainer. This man's name is Raymond; he knows French and German very well, is thoroughly used to his business, and will be much more use to me. He's really quite an elegant-looking fellow. When *he* walks off with anything, it won't be less than my diamond wristband studs or my dinner plate. Hallo! what's the row? What is that brute Moustache doing? I know that dog will come to grief some day."

We were now driving through the park, that fresh, beautiful park that the barbarous Yankee decreed to want "clearing"—I should say, his appreciation of beauty wanted clearing rather more—and the dog had bounded on many yards in front of us, with his black muzzle to the ground, apparently more engaged in bringing others to grief than coming to grief himself, for, having met a very small Skye in his onward path, he had immediately given chase; and having nipped scores of cats, and not a few dogs, by the neck in his time, and being in his general habits a most blood-thirsty individual, it was easy to predict which way the chase would end. De Vigne whistled and shouted to him—all in vain. Moustache had only belonged to him a few days, and had not the slightest respect for his master. The little Skye fled before him; but the Skye's minutes were already numbered, when a girl, sketching under the trees, sprang forward, caught up the little dog, and slowly retreated, keeping her eyes steadily fixed on Moustache's fierce, glaring, yellow eyeballs, and ferocious white fangs, which his lips, curled up in an ominous growl, fully displayed. We had barely reached the spot, even at our stretching gallop—and De Vigne lashed the horses like mad, for he knew the bull-dog was dangerous—when Moustache, furious at the interruption to his sport, leaped up and snapped at the puppy. The girl, with more pluck

than prudence, lifted her Skye out of his reach, and struck the bull-dog's great bullet head with all the force of her little clinched right hand. Moustache gave one fierce low growl, sprang upon her and knocked her down, griping at her throat. Just as his immense teeth, covered with angry foam, almost touched her neck, De Vigne sprang off the phaeton, caught the dog's skin, and dragged him back. Moustache strove like a mad thing to wrench from his grasp, and fly at him, for, balked of its prey twice, its savageness was as dangerous as madness. De Vigne set his teeth; it was as much as he could do to hold the furious beast, but he clinched at its throat harder and harder, never relaxing the iron hold of his right hand, till, as the struggles in his grasp grew fainter and more feeble, and Moustache was well-nigh strangled, he stretched out his left hand to me for the driving-whip; but the girl, who had not fainted, or screamed, or had any nonsense, sprang up, laid her hand on his arm, and said, in a pretty, soft, beseeching voice,—

“Please don't hurt your dog any more—pray don't. He could not tell he was doing any wrong, poor fellow, and he has had quite punishment enough.”

De Vigne turned to her with a smile. He liked her for thinking of the dog instead of her own past danger.

“Yes, he knew he was doing wrong, because he has been taught never to fly at anything without command. But, to be sure, he cannot help the nature he was born with being a savage one; and, I dare say, the only law he will recognize will be a muzzle. It is I who am to blame, for letting him go without one. You are not hurt at all, I trust? You are a very brave young lady not to be more frightened.”

She was frightened, though; for, now the excitement was over, she was very pale, and trembled a good deal besides

She had to lean against one of the trees, for in her fall she had slightly twisted her left ankle.

"You have hurt your foot!" exclaimed De Vigne
"Confound the dog, what a fool I was to bring him! Is it very painful?"

"No."

"I fancy it is, in spite of your denial. I fear you will never forgive my dog or me, and if you do, I shall not easily pardon myself for allowing such a savage brute to run loose. Pray do not try to walk," he cried, as the girl, with a bright smile, began to limp along the road. "Allow me to drive you to your home; if you exert that ankle while it is just hurt you may have such a tedious sprain. Let me drive you home. If you refuse, I shall think you bear some resentment still, and it would only be just if you did. Allow me—pray do."

"Oh, thank you, it is not far; but there are all my sketching things, and—indeed, I think I could walk."

"But I think indeed you must not. Soames, give the ribbons to Captain Chevasney, and go and pick up those drawings and color-boxes under the tree yonder. Now, where may I drive?" said De Vigne, lifting the little artist into the front seat, with her Skye on her lap, and her portfolio, block, and moist-color-box under the seat. Soames was bidden to walk on to Colonel Sabretasche's. I got up in the back seat, and De Vigne took the ribbons, gave the grays their heads, and started off again. The young artist was a very fascinating-looking little waif and stray; but De Vigne would have done just the same if it had been an elderly gentleman, or an old market woman, whom Moustache had disabled. "Where am I to drive?" he asked.

"To St. Crucis-on-the-Hill; a long name, but a very little farm," laughed the girl. "You do not know it, I

dare say? No; I thought not. When we are out of the park turn to the left, take the first turning to the right, and a quarter of a mile straight on will bring you there. I am so sorry to take you so far."

"My grays will do 'so far' in ten minutes," said De Vigne, smiling. It was no particular pleasure to him to drive this girl home, and he did not say it was; he never complimented by mere complaisance now. "Do you often come to sketch in this park?"

"Almost every day," said the little lady, who had not lost the dear privilege of her sex, the tongue, and talked to De Vigne as frankly as to an old acquaintance. "I love the trees so dearly. I am never tired of watching the shadows fade off and on, and the delicate, fresh first green give place to golden brown, and the shy, graceful deer come trooping up to lie down under their great boughs. One can never tire of woodland scenery, there is so much change in it."

"You take a different view of Richmond Park to the generality," laughed De Vigne. "With most young ladies Richmond is connected with water parties and *déjeûners*, flirtations and champagne."

She laughed.

"I know of none of those things, so I cannot well associate them with it. Richmond to me is full of other remembrances: of charming Horace Walpole and lovely Anne Damer, of Swift and Gay, and St. John and the 'little crooked thing that asks questions,' (how I detest Lady Mary for calling him so!) and all those courtly gentlemen and stately ladies with their hoops and their patches, their minuets and their Ombre, who used to gather here like so many Watteau groups."

"She's talkative enough!" thought De Vigne, as he answered her: "Few young ladies who come to Richmond now would know much about your associations, despite

their 'finishing.' Their present is too full of inanities to allow them time to dwell on the beauties of the past."

"And my present is so empty that I am driven to history for companions and memories," said the girl, with a shadow on her face. "This is the turning—in at that gate, if you please."

We turned in at the gate—it was as much as the dashing mail phaeton could do to pass it—and into a small paved court belonging to a little farm. On one side of it stood hayricks and a barn, where a stout, red-haired Omphale was feeding chickens, and beguiling an awkward Hercules in fustian from his proper task of taking out a cartful of bread into the town; on the other side stood the house, a long, low, thatched, and picturesque tenement, more like Hampshire than Middlesex; at the bottom there was a garden, an orchard, and a paddock, now black and bare enough in the chill February morning.

"You will come in?" said the little artist, as we drew up before the door. "Pray do. I want to speak to you."

"What a strange little thing!" whispered De Vigne to me, as we followed her through the house to a room at the west end, a long low room, with an easel standing in its wide bay-window, and water-colors, etchings, pastels, études à deux crayons, pictures of all kinds, were hung about its walls, while some books, and casts, and flowers gave a refinement to its plain simplicity often wanting in many a gilt and gorgeous drawing-room I have entered.

"So you have not recognized me!" said the girl, taking off her black hat, and looking up in De Vigne's face.

As she spoke, I remembered her as the same with the subject of Violet Molyneux's amusing episode in Pall Mall. De Vigné was wholly surprised; he looked at her for some moments.

"Recognize you? I am ashamed to say I do not."

“Ah! you have so much more to think of than I. It is not the least likely you could, but I have never forgotten *you*, Sir Folko. I knew you the other day, when that young lady’s servant knocked down my portfolio. Have you quite forgotten little Alma? I am so glad to see you—you cannot think how much!”

And Alma Tressillian held out both her hands to him, with a bright, joyous smile on her upraised face.

“Little Alma!” repeated De Vigne. “Yes, yes! I remember you now. Where could my mind have gone not to recognize you at once? You are not the least altered since you were a child. But how have you come from Lorave to London? Come, tell me everything. My dear child, you are not more pleased to see me than I am to see you!”

I think that was only a bit of courteous kindness on De Vigne’s part; in reality, he cared very little about it, though Alma Tressillian was pretty enough not to have been viewed altogether with indifference by most men. I am not sure, though, that pretty is the word for her. It is so dealt out to every girl who resembles those lovely waxen dolls sold in diminutive baby-clothes or ball-dresses in the Pantheon, or who chances to have a pink color and a stereotyped smile, that I hate using it to a woman *worth* admiring. I generally take refuge in those far higher words—fascinating, séduisante, brilliant, attrayante—where I really like a woman—but how few deserve those epithets! Alma was little altered since her childhood: now, as then, her golden hair and eloquent dark-blue eyes, with the constant change, and play, and animation of all her features, made her greatest beauty. They were not regularly beautiful as Violet Molyneux’s, though with her, as with Violet, the mobility and extreme intellectuality of expression was the chief charm, after all. She was not so tall as Violet,

nor had she that exquisite and perfect form which made the belle of the season compared with Pauline Bonaparte; but she had something graceful and fairyesque about her, and both her face and figure were instinct with a life, an intelligence, a radiance of expression which promised you a rare combination of sweet temper and hot passions, intense susceptibility, and highly cultivated intellect. You might not have called her pretty: you must have called her much more—irresistibly winning and attractive.

“Come, tell me everything about yourself,” repeated De Vigne, as he pushed a low chair for her, and threw himself down on an arm-chair near. “You must remember Captain Chevasney as well as you do me. We shall both of us be anxious to hear all you have to tell.”

“Yes, I remember him,” smiled Alma, with a pretty bend of her head, (she did not add “as well.”) “I was so sorry when you did not see me that day in Pall Mall; I thought I might never come across you again. You must not be too cross to that poor bull-dog, for if he had not flown at Sylvè I might not have found you now.”

“I am under obligations to Moustache, certainly,” said De Vigne, with a half-smile. “Nevertheless, I shall never bring him here again, for his fangs were dangerously near your throat. He is a savage brute, but he has had a lesson he will not easily forget. But where is your grandpapa?—is he in town?”

She looked down, and her lips quivered:

“Grandpapa is in Lorave. He has been dead three years.”

“Dead! My dear child, how careless of me! I am grieved, indeed!” exclaimed De Vigne, involuntarily.

“You could not tell,” answered Alma, looking up at him, great tears in her blue eyes. “He died more than three years ago, but it is as fresh to me as if it were but

yesterday. Nobody will ever love me as he did. He was so kind, so gentle, so good. In losing him I lost everything. I prayed day and night that I might die with him; he was my only friend!"

"Poor little Alma!" said De Vigne, touched out of that haughty reserve now habitual to him. "I am grieved to hear it, both for the loss to you of your only protector, and the loss to the world of as true-hearted and noble-natured a man as ever breathed. If I had been in England he would have seen me in Lorave, as I promised, but I have been in India the eight years since we parted. I wish I had written to him; I ought to have done so; but one never knows things till too late."

"He left a letter for you, in case I should ever meet you. You were the only person kind to us after the loss of his fortune," said Alma, as she sprang across the room—all her movements were rapid, and had something foreign in them—knelt down before a desk, and brought an unsealed envelope to De Vigne, directed to him by a hand now powerless forever.

"This for me? I wish I had seen him," said De Vigne, as he put it away in the breast of his coat. "I ought to have written to him; but my own affairs engrossed me, and—we are all profound egotists, you know, whatever unselfishness we may pretend. What was the cause of his death? Will it pain you to tell me?"

"Paralysis. He had a paralytic stroke six months before, which ended in congestion of the brain. But how gentle, how good, how patient he was through it all! There was never any one like him."

She stopped again; the tears rolled off her long black lashes. She was quite unaccustomed to conceal what she felt, and she did not know that feeling is bad ton.

"And you have been in England ever since?" asked De Vigne, to divert her thoughts.

"Oh no!" she answered, brushing the tears off her lashes. "You know Miss Russell, the governess grandpapa took for me to Lorave? She has been so kind. She was with me at grandpapa's death. I was fifteen then, and for a year afterward she stayed with me in Lorave; I loved the place so dearly, dearer still after his grave was there, and I could not bear to leave it. But Miss Russell had no money, and no home. She works for her living, and she could not waste her time on me, and the little grandpapa could leave me was not enough for both of us. She was obliged to look for another situation, and when she came over to it—it is in a rector's family near Staines—I came over with her, and she placed me here. My old nurse has this farm; grandpapa bought it for her many years ago, when she left us and married. Her husband is dead, but she keeps on the farm, and makes bread to send into town. It was the only place we knew of, and nurse was so delighted to let me have the rooms that I have been here ever since."

"Poor little thing, what a life!" cried De Vigne, involuntarily. "How dull you must be, Alma!"

She raised her eyebrows and shrugged her shoulders. Gesticulation was natural to her, and she had caught it still more from the Italians at Lorave.

"Buried alive! Sylvo to talk to, and the flowers to talk to me—that is my society. But wherever I might have been, I should have missed *him* equally, and I can never be alone while I have my easel and my books."

"Have you painted these?" I exclaimed, in surprise, for there were masterly strokes in the sketches on the walls that would have shamed more than one "Associate."

"Yes. An Italian artist, spending the summer at Lorave, saw me drawing one day; something as Cimabue saw little Giotto, and had me to his studio, and gave me a

regular course of instruction. He told me I might equal Elizabetta Sirani. I shall never do that, I am afraid, but I worship art, and even now I find a very good sale for my little sketches; they take them at Ackermann's and Faer's, and I work hard. Work is a wrong word though, it is my delight. I go and sketch every day out of doors, to catch the winter and summer tints. But I hate winter; it is so unkind, so cheerless. I always paint spring and summer in my pictures; not your poor pale English summer, but summer golden and glorious, with the boughs hanging to the ground with the weight of their own beauty, and the vineyards and corn-fields glowing with their rich promise for the autumn."

"Enthusiastic as ever?" laughed De Vigne. "How are our friends the fairies, Alma?"

"Do you suppose I shall give news of them to a disbeliever?" said Alma, with a toss of her head. "I have not forgotten your want of faith. Are you as great a skeptic now?"

"Ten times more so—not only of fairy lore, but of pretty well everything else. Fairies are as well worth credence as all the other faiths, creeds, and superstitions of the day; I would as soon credit Queen Mab as a 'doctrinal point.' Years add to our skepticism instead of lessening it. What do *you* think of the fairies now?"

"Look! Do you not think I sketched that from sight?" said Alma, turning her easel to him, where she had sketched in water-colors a charming Titania—a true Titania, such as "on pressed flowers does sleep," for whom "the cowslips tall her pensioners be:"

Where oxlips and the nodding violets grow,
Quite over-canopied with lush woodbine,
With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine,
Lulled in those flowers with dances and delight,

the veritable fairy queen of those dainty offsprings of romance, who used to meet

in grove or green,
By fountain clear or spangled starlight sheen.

"How splendidly you draw, Alma!" exclaimed De Vigne. "If you exhibited at the Water-Color Society, you would excite as much wonder as Rosa Bonheur. And do these pay you well?"

"Yes; at least, what seems so to me."

"Pauvre enfant!" smiled De Vigne; her ideas of wealth and his were strikingly different. "A friend of mine is a great connoisseur of these things. I must show them to him some day; but I cannot stay now, for I have an engagement at two, and it is now striking."

"But you will come and see me again," interrupted Alma, beseechingly. "Pray do. You cannot think how lonely I am. I have no friends, you know."

"Oh yes, I will come," answered De Vigne. "I have much more to hear about you and your pursuits. How could you know us, Alma, after so long?"

"I did not know Captain Chevasney," said the little lady, with uncomplimentary frankness, "but I knew you perfectly. The first picture I could really sketch was one of your face, as I remembered it, for Sir Folko. You know I always thought you like him. I will show it you some day. Besides, grandpapa talked of you so constantly, and I was always expecting you to come to Lorave with your yacht, as you had promised, that it was impossible for me to forget you. I was so grieved when you did not notice me in Pall Mall. I called you, but you did not hear. You were thinking of that young lady. How lovely she was! Who is she?"

"Violet Molyneux—Lord Molyneux's daughter. I was

not thinking of her, though, but that the pair of horses in her carriage were not worth half what I heard they gave for them. Young ladies are the last things in my thoughts, I assure you," said De Vigne, laughing, as he gave her his hand; "and now, good-by. I am very pleased to have found you out. I shall not be long before I find my way to the farm again—*without* my bull-dog."

The gentle courtesy natural to him from his good breeding made his manner very winning to women, especially when he discarded the cold reserve and cynical sarcasm now habitual to him. No wonder that Alma looked gratefully in his face, and bid him, with a radiant smile, not defer his promised visit to St. Crucis, as he had done his promised yachting to Lorave. She guessed little enough *what* had prevented that yachting to Lorave.

"Strange we should have lighted on that child!" said he, as we drove to the Dilcoosha. "She is the same frank, impulsive, enthusiastic little thing as when we first saw her. She was the heiress of Weive Hurst then; now she has to work for her bread. Who can prophesy the ups and downs of life? Here am I with forty thousand a year, bored to death, and might be happier if I were a private on sixpence a day; and there is a girl, a delicate child, who has to earn her critical subsistence by her talents. Boughton Tressillian was game to the backbone. Perhaps she inherits some of his pluck—it is to be hoped so—she will want it. A woman, young, unprotected, and as attractive as she looks, is pretty sure to come to grief some way or other. Her very virtues will be her ruin! She is not one of your sensible, prudent, cold, commonplace women, who go through the world scathless; Lucretias and Casta Divas, too wise to err, too selfish to sacrifice themselves, who win from an admiring public a reputation for virtue and honor, while their real mainsprings are prudence and egotism

Alma will come to grief, I am afraid. Here, take the reins, Arthur, and I will see what her grandfather says. Poor old fellow! my conscience will prick me for having neglected him. I might have written when I was in Scinde, but I thought of nothing there but my troop, and 'slaying my fellow-creatures,' as Sabretasche terms it."

He tore open the letter, and gave a long whistle as he finished it.

"What's the matter?" said I.

"Poor little thing! She hasn't thirty pounds a year, and isn't his grandchild after ail."

"Not his grandchild! What do you mean?"

"What I say."

"His daughter, I suppose?"

"No; no relation at all. The letter is scrawled to me, broken off unfinished; probably where his hand and strength failed him, poor old man! He says my name recurred to him as the only person who had not heeded his decline of fortune, and the only man of honor whom he could trust. Out of his income as consul he contrived to save her a few hundreds—voilà tout! He must leave her, of course, to struggle for herself; and this is what weighs so heavily upon him, because, it seems, he adopted this child, who was not the slightest relation to him, when she was three years old, believing, of course, that he would make her one of the richest heiresses in England; and, according to his view of the case, he considers he has done her a great wrong. Who she is he does not tell me, except that she was a little Italian girl he picked up in Naples. He was going, no doubt, to add more, as he began the letter by saying he wished her secret to be known to some one, and having heard much of my mother's sweet and generous character, appealed to her, through me, to aid and serve Alma, if she would; but here the sentence breaks off un-

finished. Poor fellow! his strength failed him, I suppose."

"Do you think Alma knows it; she calls him her grandfather still?"

"Can't say—yet of course she does," said De Vigne, with a cynical smile. "No woman's curiosity ever allowed her to keep an unsealed letter three years and never look into it. However, I will not tell her of it till I see whether she does or not. Here we are. It will be as well not to tell Sabretasche of his little neighbor, eh? He is such a deuced fellow for women, and she would be certain to go down before his thousand-and-one accomplishments. Not that it would matter much, perhaps; she will be somebody's prey, no doubt, and she might as well be the Colonel's as any other man's, save that he is a little quicker fickle than most, knowing better than most the little value of his toys."

With which concluding sarcasm De Vigne threw the reins to his groom, who met him at the door, and entered that abode of perfect taste and epicurean luxury, known as the Dilcoosha, where Sabretasche and luncheon were waiting for us; and where, after due discussion of Strasbourg pâtés, Comet Hock, Bass, and the news of the day, we inspected La Violette's paces, pronounced her pretty certain, unless something very unforeseen in the way of twitch and opium-ball occurred, to win the Queen's Cup, and drove back to town together, De Vigne to go into the U. S., Sabretasche to accompany Violet Molyneux and her mother to a morning concert, and I to call on a certain lady who had well-nigh broken my heart when it was young and breakable, who had exchanged rings with me under the Kensington Garden trees, when she was fresh, fair, kind-natured Gwen Brandling, and who was now staying in town as Madame la Duchesse de la Vieillecour, a

French ambassador's wife, black velvet and point replacing the muslin and ribbons, dignity in the stead of girlish grace, and—*hélas pour mes beaux jours!*—a *fin sourire* of skilled coquetry in lieu of that heartfelt sunny smile, Gwen's whilom charm. I take it doves are sold by the dozen on the altar steps of St. George's, but—it is true that the doves have a strange passion for the gold coins that buy them, and would not fly away if they could!

N'importe! Madame de la Vieillecour and I met as became people living in good society; if less fresh she was perhaps more fascinating, and though one begins life tender and transparent as Sèvres, one is stone-china, luckily, long before the finish, warranted never to break at any blows whatever. And as I drove my tilbury from the Duchess's door, I thought, I did not know why, of little Alma Tresillian, who was just opening the fresh leaves of *her* book of life;—she looked terribly delicate Sèvres *now*, needing gentlest touches, tenderest shelter. When it had passed through the furnace and come forth from the fire, would the Sèvres be hardened or—destroyed



PART THE TENTH.

I.

HOW VIOLET MOLYNEUX TOUCHED OTHER CHORDS THAN THOSE IN HER SONG.

SCARCELY any one was in town except a few very early birds, heralds of the coming season, and the members, victims to an un pitying nation; but there were still some people one knew dotted about in Belgravia and Park Lane, others in jointure-houses or villas up "Tamese Ripe,"

among them a very pretty widow, Leila Lady Puffdoff, who dwelt in the retirement of her dower-house at Twickenham, and enlivened the latter portion of her veuvage by matinées musicales, breakfasts, and luncheons for some of those dear friends who had been the detestation of le feu Puffdoff, he being old and not a little jealous. To a combination of all three, Sabretasche, De Vigne, Curly, a man called Monckton, and myself, drove in De Vigne's drag a day or two after our rencontre with little Alma Tressillian.

"An amateur affair, isn't it?" asked De Vigne. "Artistes' morning concerts are bad enough, where Italian singers barbarize 'Annie Laurie' into an allegro movement with shakes and aspeggios, and English singers scream Italian with vile British o's and a's; but amateur matinées musicales, where highly finished young beauties in becoming morning toilettes excruciate one's ears, whether they have melody in their voices or no, just because they have been taught by Garcia or Gardoni, are absolutely unbearable. Don't you think so, you worshiper of harmony?"

"I? Certainly," responded Sabretasche. "As a rule, I shun all amateur things. Where professional people, who have applied, sixteen hours a day, all their energies and all their capabilities to one subject, even then rarely succeed, how is it possible but that the performances of those who take up the study as a pastime must be a miserable failure, or at best but second-rate? Occasionally, however, (indeed *whenever* you see it, but the sight is so rare!) talent will do for you without study more than study ever will——"

"As you will show us in your songs this morning, I suppose?" laughed Monckton.

"If I sang ill I should never sing at all," replied Sabretasche, carelessly, with that consciousness of power which

true talent is as sure to have, as it is sure *not* to have undue self-appreciation. "I mean, however, in Miss Molyneux's Aria; even you will admire that, De Vigne."

"Violet?" said Monckton. "She does sing tolerably; but I can't say I like that girl—so much too satirical for a woman."

"I dare say you may find her so. I know popular preachers who consider Thackeray too satirical as an author, because he drew the portrait of Charles Honey-mann," said Sabretasche, quietly.

"Something new to hear the Colonel defending a woman's character," whispered the injured Monckton to me on the back seat. "He generally is more the cause of blackening 'em, eh?"

"I wish I were like you, Sabretasche," laughed De Vigne, "and could shut myself in, and the world out, of my studio while I chipped my marble, or filled my canvas, or, like Curly here, who worships his whiskers, and his bottes vernies, and *really* thinks women delightful to flirt with and adore. I wish to Heaven I were an artist, or a dandy——"

"Or anything but a married man, eh?" sneered Monckton.

Sabretasche's expressive face grew dark at his words, Curly's languid eye flashed fire, and I gave Monckton a pretty hard kick, I can assure you.

"I wish I were either an artist or a dandy," pursued De Vigne, quietly, though he set his teeth hard, and you could see the blood mount even into the pale bronze of his cheek; "each has his *métier*, finds his mission, and employs his time. Now, poor devil that I am, what can I do? Read whatever trash of technical science and Boswellian biographies comes out; mix in society to bore and to be bored; buy horses and bet on them; say *Cui bono?* like Sabretasche,

to all of them. Sport, to be sure, there is, and libraries; those one can't tire of; but beyond, what is there for a man to do?"

"You can come and see the Puffdoff, and get her longs yeux fired at you, for the best of all reasons, that you are profoundly insensible to the effect of her artillery," said I, as we turned into the grounds of that fair countess-*dowager*, aged twenty-two!

"She's a brilliant-looking woman, De Vigne," laughed Sabretasche. "You should be grateful for being au mieux with her."

"Brilliant? Very much so. But so are the tinsel wings at the ballet."

"Hang it, she is very charming, De Vigne!" cried Curly.

"Certainly. Pity the charms are rouge, Kalydor, and Oriental tint, and would vanish out of sight if her maid and dressing-box were stolen."

"How confoundedly satirical you are!"

"No, I am not," said De Vigne.

Nor was he. He was only too clear-sighted for his own peace. Should we not at thirty take a great pleasure in Drury Lane, if we preserved the happy faith we had at ten in the witticisms of the clown, the miseries of ill-starred pantaloon, the glories of the gorgeous creature in green velvet and Spanish boots, the adorable charms of the fairy creature in gauze and spangles, who danced before the village show in our gleeful childhood? *Passez-moi le mot*, the comparison is stale, but a pantomime, with its paint, its clap-trap, its worn-out jokes, its grimaced smiles, its trap-doors and its artifices, its gay-colored scenes and its dirty bustling coulisses, where those who throne it as kings and lords upon the boards eat bread and cheese with aching hearts in the green-room behind, is so like society!

Yet if one has been behind it all, and only mentions in profoundest pity that its Rachels speak bad grammar off the stage; that its Talmas are at heart the saddest of all men; that its Meinna Schrodgers, with Weber's and Beethoven's smiles upon them, have been trained by privation; that its Adrienne Lecouvreur, smiling in "Monime," will die with grief for her abandonment by Maurice de Saxe; that its Roseval, laughing and singing, runs off the stage to tend a broken limb with a breaking heart—if, coming from behind the scenes, we recount these things, people call us satirical, though we have seen the smiles being manufactured, and the rouge laid on thick over hollow cheeks!

Sabretasche was quite right; it was a treat to hear Violet Molyneux's singing. Every person at the Puffdoff's house flocked out of conservatory, drawing-rooms, or cabinets ~~de~~ ^{de} peinture, at the notes of her clear, rich, passionate, bell-like voice. We, just at that time barren of prime donne, had heard nothing like it of late; and Violet's voice was really one which, as a professional, would have ranked her very high. Besides, there was a tone in it, a certain freshness and gladness, mingled with a strange pathos and passion, which moved even those among her auditors most blasés, most fastidious, and most ready to sneer, into silence and admiration.

"That is music," said De Vigne, in the door of the music-room. "If she would sing at morning concerts I would forswear them no longer. Look at that fellow; if he be ever really caught at all, it will be by that voice."

I looked at that fellow, being Sabretasche, who leaned against the organ, close to Violet Molyneux; his face was calm and impassive as ever, but his melancholy eyes were fixed upon her with such intense earnestness, that Violet, glancing up at him as she sang, colored, despite all her self-possession, and her voice was unsteady for half a note.

Sabretasche noticed it perhaps, at least his eyes flashed out of their melancholy into the look which excited De Vigne's remark. It was quite true, Lauzun though the Colonel might be, I believe Violet's voice pleased him still more than her beauty. The latter beguiled the senses, as many others had before her; the former beguiled the soul, a far rarer charm for him.

"You came late; half our concert was over," said Violet to him, after luncheon, as they stood talking in a miniature winter-garden, one of the whims—and a very charming whim, too—of the Puffdoff's.

"I came in time to sing what I had promised, and to hear what I desired, your——"

"You did like it?" said Violet, looking up at his radiant eyes.

"Too well to compliment you on it. I 'liked' it as I liked, or rather I *felt* it—as I have felt, occasionally, the tender and holy beauty of Raphael, the impassioned tenderness of the 'Loves of Rimini,' the hushed glories of a summer night, the mystical chimes of a starlit sea. Your voice did me good, as those things did, until the feverish fret and noise of practical life wore off their influence again."

Violet gave a deep sigh of delight.

"You make me so happy! I often think that the doctrine of immortality has no better plea than the vague yearning for something unseen and unconceived, the unuttered desire which rises in us at the sound of true music. I have heard music at which I could have shed more bitter tears than any I have known, for I have had no sorrow, and which answered the restless passions of my heart better than any human mind that ever wrote."

"Quite true; and that is why, to me, music is one of the strangest gifts to man. Painting creates, but creates by

imitation. If a man imagine an angel, he must paint from the woman's face that he loves best—the Fornarina sat for the Madonna. If he paint a god, he must take a man for model; anything different from man would be grotesque. We never see a Jupiter or a Christ that is anything more than a fiercely-handsome, or a sadly-handsome, man. Music, on the contrary, creates from a spirit-world of its own: the fable of Orpheus and its lyre is not wholly a fable. In the passionate crash and tumult of an overture, in the tender pathos of one low tenor note, in the full swell of a Magnificat, in the low sigh of a Miserere, the human heart throws off the frippery and worry of the world, the nobler impulses, the softer charity, the unuttered aspirations, that are buried, yet still live, beneath so much that is garish and contemptible—wake up, and a man remembers all he is and all he might have been, and grieves, as the dwellers in Arcadia grieved over their exile, over his better nature lost."

"Ah," answered Violet, her gay spirits saddened by the tone in which Sabretasche, ordinarily so careless, light, nonchalant, and unruffled, spoke, "if we were always what we are in such moments how different would the world be! How ashamed we are of our petty quarrels and impulses, how far we are lifted from the rancor and the flitting trifles which mar all the beauty of human life! On the spur of such combined tranquillity and exaltation as music creates we are so much truer, so much nobler! We realize the temptations of others, we feel how little right we, with so much sin among us, have to dare to judge another. If human nature lasted what it is in its best moments, poets would have no need to fable of an Eden."

Sabretasche looked down on her long and earnestly:

"Do you know that you are to me something as music is to you? When I am with you I am truer and better. I breathe a purer atmosphere. You make me for the time

being feel as I used to feel in my golden days. You bring me back enthusiasm, belief in human nature, noble aspirations, purer tastes, tenderer thoughts—in a word, you bring me back youth!”

Violet lifted her eyes to his, full of the happiness his words gave her. Sabretasche’s hand rested on hers as she played with a West Indian creeper, clinging round the sides of a vase of myrtles. The color wavered in the Parian fairness of her face; her eyes and lips were tremulous with a vague sense of delight and expectation, but Sabretasche took his hand away with a short quick sigh, and set himself to bending the creeper into order.

There was a dead silence, a disappointed shadow stole unconsciously over Violet’s tell-tale face. She looked up quickly:

“Why do you always talk of youth as a thing passed away from you? It is such folly. You are now in your best years.”

“It is past and gone from my heart.”

“But might it not have a resurrection?”

“It might, but it may not.”

Violet mused a moment over the anomalous reply.

“What curse have you on you?” she said, involuntarily.

Sabretasche turned his eyes on her, filled with unutterable sadness:

“Do not rouse my demon; let him sleep while he can. But, Violet, when you hear about in the world of which you and I are both votaries—as hear you have done and will do—many tales of my past and my present, many reports and scandals circulated by my friends, believe them or not as you like by what you know of me; but believe, at the least, that I am neither so light-hearted nor so hard-hearted as they consider me. You are kind enough to honor me with your—your interest; you will

never guess how dearly I prize it; but there are things in my career which I cannot reveal to you, and against interest in me and my fate I warn you; it can bring you no happiness, for it can never go *beyond* friendship!"

It was a strange speech from a man to a woman, especially from a man famous for his conquests to a woman famous for her beauty!

He saw a shiver pass over Violet's form, and the delicate rose hue of her cheeks faded utterly. He sighed bitterly as he added, the blue veins rising in his calm white forehead:

"None to love me have I; I never had, I never may have!"

Great tears gathered slowly in Violet's eyes, and, despite all her self-control, fell down on the glowing petals of the West Indian flowers.

"But you will let me know more of you than any one else does?" she said, in a hurried, broken voice. "You will not, at least, forbid me your friendship?"

"Friendship—friendship!" repeated Sabretasche, with a strange smile. "You do not know what an idle word, what a treacherous salve, what a vain impossibility is friendship between men and women. Yet if you are willing to give me yours I will do my best to merit it, and to keep myself to it. Now let us go. I like too well to be with you to dare be with you long."

He gave her his arm, they lounged together into a cabinet de peinture, and criticised with the others a little Mieris newly added to the collection. Young ladies remark what high spirits Violet Molyneux has; too high, they think. Married women observe what a shocking flirt Vivian Sabretasche is; he is much more attentive to the Puffdoff than to Violet, whom he has been going after for the last two months, but evidently cares no more for than for his

soiled gloves. Mammās and chaperones inquire if they may congratulate Lady Molyneux on the rumors already afloat regarding her daughter's engagement to Colonel Sabretasche, and the Viscountess cries, "My dear Lady Fitzspy! that flirt? Heaven forefend! *He* may wish it, but *I*——And, besides, Violet's affections are most happily centered in a very different quarter." Whereat, the mammās and chaperones whose daughters have not sung so well at the amateur concert are disconcerted, knowing that the young Duke of Regalia is the *enfant de la maison* in Lowndes Square. So our friends use their lorgnons, and so much do they see of any of us, with all their skill at finesses, divination, and intrigues, spun on behind the backs of fans and down ivory parasol-handles.

II.

"L'AMITIÉ EST L'AMOUR SANS AILES."

"WHAT does Sabretasche mean with Molyneux's daughter?" said De Vigne to me in that same cabinet de peinture, De Vigne having only just escaped from the harpy's clutch of the little Countess's fairy fingers.

"How the devil should I tell? He's a confounded inconstant fellow, you know. He's always flirting with some woman or other."

"Flirtation doesn't make men look as he looked while he listened to her. Flirtation amuses. Sabretasche is not amused here, but rather, I should say, intensely worried."

"What should worry him? He could marry the girl if he wished."

"How can you tell?"

"Well, I suppose so. The Molyneux would let him

have her fast enough. Her mother wants to get her off; she don't like two milliners' bills in Regent Street and the Palais Royal. But *you* interesting yourself in a love affair! What a Saul among the prophets!"

"Spare your wit, Arthur. I never meddle with such tinder, I assure you. I am not over fond of my fellow-creatures, but I don't hate them intensely enough to help them to marry. I say, have you not been sufficiently bored here? The concert is over. Let us go, shall we?"

"With pleasure. I say, you have not paid your promised visit to little Tressillian. 'Tisn't far; we might walk over, eh?"

"So we will. Are you after poor Alma's chevelure dorée already?" laughed De Vigne. "Make her mistress of Longholme, Chevasney, and I'll give her away to you with pleasure. I won't be a party to other conditions, for her grandfather's sake—her guardian's sake, rather. By the way, I must make out whether she knows or not that the relationship was a myth."

"Thank you. I have no private reasons for proposing the call, except the always good and excellent one of passing the time and seeing a pretty woman. There is the Puffdoff coming after you again. Let's get away while we can."

We were soon out of that little bijou of a dower-house that shrined the weeds and wiles of the late Puffdoff's handsome countess, and smoking our cigars, as we walked across to Richmond. We found her old nurse at the gate, a nice, neat, pleasant old woman, who told us Miss Alma, as she called her, was in-doors.

"Ah, sir, I remember you when you were a coming over to Weive Hurst when my poor dear master was alive, and in his own home, that those brutes took away from him. God forgive me for calling 'em so, but they *were* brutes,

with lies in their mouths and Bibles in their hands. When that cruel wretch Sir John Lacquers came down to stay with my master, when Miss Alma was little, he took my master to task for not having family sermons to read to the servants every night, and he was talking the whole time he was eating of his French dishes and drinking of his French wines—and didn't he like 'em, too, sir!—of the beauty of giving up the things of this world. But that's always the way with them that preach—they never practice, sir, never; and now they say that wretch is a living in France, sir, as grand as a duke, and that poor dear child is wearing her pretty eyes out. Don't let her do it, sir; pray don't!"

At which De Vigne laughed, and went into the house to see the poor dear child in question. He opened the door unannounced, for the best of all reasons that there was no one there to announce him. Alma was sitting at her easel, with her back to the door, painting earnestly, with little Sylvo at her side. She was dressed prettily, inexpensively I have no doubt, but somehow more picturesquely than many of the women in hundred guinea dresses and point worth a dowry—the picturesqueness of artistic taste, and innate refinement which gave her the brilliance and grace of a picture. She turned rapidly at the closing of the door, sprang up, and ran toward him with that rapidity and impulsiveness which always made her, in that respect, seem much younger than she was.

"Ah! you have come at last! I began to think you would cheat me as you cheated me of the yachting trip to Lorave; and yet I had faith in you. I thought you would not disappoint me."

"No; but I shall scold you," said De Vigne, "for sitting there, wearing your eyes out—as Mrs. Lee phrases it—over your easel. Why do you do it?"

"It is my only companion," pleaded Alma. "I like it so much. With my brush I can escape away into an ideas world, and shut out the real and actual, with all its harshness, trials, and privations. You know the sun shines only for me upon canvas; and besides," she added, with a gay smile, "to take a practical view of it, I have little or no money, and I must make what talent I have into gold."

"Poor little thing!" exclaimed De Vigne. Malgré lui, it struck him, who had flung about thousands at his pleasure ever since he was a boy, as so singular, and as somehow so unjust, that this girl, young as she was, should have to labor for her living with the genius with which nature had endowed her so royally—genius the divine, the god-giver, the signet-seal, so rare, so priceless, with which nature marks the few who are to ennoble and sanctify the mass.

"Ah! I *am* a poor little thing!" repeated Alma, with a moue mutine indicative of supreme pitié d'elle-même and indignation at her fate. "I should love society; I see nothing but nurse and Sylvo. I love fun; I have nobody to talk it to but the goldfinch. I hate solitude, and I am always alone. I should like beautiful music, beautiful pictures, gardens, statues, conservatories, luxuries, all the agréments of life. This quiet life is not at all my rôle; I vegetate in it."

"More honor to you to bear it so well, Miss Tressilian," said I.

"Oh, I don't bear it well," interrupted Alma. "I sometimes get as impatient as a bird beating its wings against a cage; I grow as restless in its monotony as you can fancy; I want to enjoy myself. So I am not a bit of a philosopher, and never shall be."

"Life will make you one in spite of yourself," said De Vigne.

"Never! If I ever come to rose-leaves, I will lie down on them coûte que coûte. As long as I can only get a straw mattress, there is not much virtue in renunciation."

"But there are cankerous worms in rose-leaves," smiled De Vigne.

"But who would ever enjoy the roses if they were always remembering that? Where is the good?"

"You little epicurean!" laughed De Vigne, looking at her amusedly. His remembrance of her as a child made him treat her with a certain gentle familiarity, very different to his usual sarcastic hauteur with young ladies of her age. "You would have a brief summer like the butterflies. That sort of summer costs one dear when the butterfly lies dying on the brown autumn leaves, and envies the bee housed safely at home."

"N'importe!" cried the little lady, recklessly. "The butterfly, at least, has enjoyed life, and the bee, I would bet, goes on humming and bustling all the year round, never knowing whether the fuchsias are red or white, as long as there is honey in them; only looking in orchises with an eye to business, and never giving a minute in his breathless toil to scent the heliotropes or kiss the blue-bells for their beauty's sake."

"Possibly not; but when the fuchsias and orchises, blue-bells and heliotropes, are withered and dried, and raked away by ruthless gardeners for the unpoetic destiny of making leaf mould, and the ground is frozen, and the trees are bare, and the wind whistles over the snow—how then? Which is best off, butterfly or bee!"

"Hold your tongue!" laughed Alma. "You put me in mind of those horrible moral apologues, and that detestable incitement to supreme selfishness, 'La cigale ayant chanté tout l'été,' where the ant is made out a most praiseworthy person, but appears to me simply cruel and mean

But to answer you is easy enough. What good does the bee get from his hard work? Has his honey taken away from him for other people's eating, and is smoked out of his house, poor little thing, by human monsters, whom, if he knew his power, he could sting to death! The butterfly, au contraire, enjoys himself to the last, dies in the course of nature, and leaves others to enjoy themselves after him."

"You did not lose your tongue in Lorave, Alma?" said De Vigne, with a grave air of solicitous interest.

With the little Tressillian he had a little of his old fun, something of his old laugh.

"No, indeed; and I should be very sorry if I had, for I love talking."

"You need not tell us that," smiled De Vigne.

"I will never talk to you again," cried Alma, with supreme dignity; "or, rather, I never would if I were not too magnanimous to avenge an insult by such enormous punishment."

"To yourself. Just so. You are quite right," said De Vigne, with an amused smile. "I only know one young lady who can equal you in that line, and she is your St. James's Street friend, Miss Molyneux."

"Ah! she would like talking, by her face; and she must talk well, too."

"Yes. Something in your style; as vehement and effervescent as a glass of champagne, and as fast as a twenty minutes' burst, up wind."

"Do you admire her?" asked Alma, quickly.

"Certainly. All men must. She is very lovely."

"Yes; it is a face to dream of. And she must be very happy," added Alma, with a sigh of envy.

"I dare say she is; she looks so."

"Have you seen her to-day?"

"Yes. Chevasney and I are just come from a *matinee musicale* at Twickenham, where she was the *lionne*."

"How I wish I were in your society," cried Alma, passionately.

"I wish you were," said De Vigne. "You are not made for solitude, nor to derive any pleasure from 'blushing unseen,' and 'wasting your sweetness on the desert air.' You are a true woman, I guess, Alma, and would enjoy shining, scintillating, slaying, and conquering. All women do who can, and those who cannot make a virtue of necessity, and renounce the admiration that refuses to come to them with as good a grace as they can muster; but they long for it all the same. But take courage, *petite*. You were born in that society—you will shine in it some day, I make no doubt."

"If I could make a name like Rosa Bonheur, I might, and then you would admire me as much as you do Miss Molyneux."

De Vigne laughed.

"What are you painting now, Alma? May we see?"

"I was drawing you," she answered, tranquilly, turning the easel toward him.

It was a really wonderful likeness from memory, done in pastels. She had admirably caught the high-bred and severe beauty of his face, and she had caught, what was much more difficult, the calm *hauteur* of his features, the suppressed passions, veiled under impenetrable reserve, which slumbered in his eyes, while there yet lingered round the grave proud lines of his mouth a shadow of the smile which now came so rarely there, but when it did, gave the lie to the coldness of its expression in repose.

"My likeness! By Jove!" cried De Vigne; "you flatter me shockingly, Alma. What on earth put it into your head, *petite*, to do that?"

"I knew you would make a splendid picture—your face is beautiful," said Alma, tranquilly.

Whereupon De Vigne went straight off into a fit of laughter, the first real, cordially amused laughter, with a touch of the old merry ring in it, that I had heard since his marriage-day.

"Why do you laugh?" said Alma, indignantly; "I only tell you the truth. Your face is perfect by the rules of art."

At which gratifying assurance De Vigne laughed still more. The girl amused him, as Richelieu's and Montaigne's little cats amused them when they laid down the scepter and the pen and tied the string to their kittens' cork. And thinking of her still merely as Tressillian's little granddaughter, he was not on his guard with her as with other women, and treated her with a cordiality and freedom more like his old than his present manners. For De Vigne was a true gentleman, every inch of him; and where he might have been careless and distant to Violet Molyneux, an aristocratic belle, he was carefully courteous and kind to Alma Tressillian, poor, unprotected, and working for her own livelihood.

"Well, Alma, I am extremely obliged to you. You have made a much handsomer fellow of me than Maclise would have done, I am afraid," said he, smiling; "and if ever my picture is wanted side by side with Wellington's, I hope, for the sake of creating an impression on posterity, that you will be kind enough to paint it for me."

"It is no handsomer than you are yourself," said Alma, resolute to maintain her own opinion; "is it, Captain Chevasney? It is too bad of you to laugh so, but that is just like your sex's ingratitude."

"Don't abuse us," said De Vigne; "that is so stale a stage-trick with women. They are eternally running after

us, and eternally vowing that they would not stir a step for any of us. They spend their whole existence in trying to catch us, but their whole breath reiterating that they only take us out of compassion. If I hear a lady abuse or find fault with us, I know that her grapes 'sont trop verts, et bons pour des goujats.' ”

Alma laughed :

“Very probably. But I don't abuse you. Au contraire, I prefer gentlemen to my own sex; and I have a right, for I have had much more kindness from them. I prefer them, too, for many other things. Your code of honor is far better than ours.”

“The generality of women have no notion of honor at all,” said De Vigne; “they tell falsehoods and circulate scandals without being called to account for it, and the laxity of honor in trifles that they learn in the nursery and school-rooms corrodes their sense of right toward others in all their after-life. Men err very often from passion and ambition, or high temper; but women's faults almost always spring from petty motives: spite, malice, love of outshining their neighbor, pleasure in small intrigues, jealousy of prettier rivals. Their sphere is little, their vices and their vanities are little likewise. A boy at school is soon taught that, however lax he may be in other things, it is ‘sneaky’ to peach, and learns a rough sort of Spartan honor; a girl, on the contrary, tells tales of her sisters unproved, and hears mamma in her drawing-room take away the character of a ‘dearest friend’ whom she sees her meet the next moment with a caress and an endearment. But modern society is too ‘religious’ to remember to be honorable, and is too occupied with proclaiming its ‘morality’ to have any time to give to common honesty

“As Sir John Lacquers taught us!”

“Sir John Lacquers and scores like him, whose ‘slips

are passed over because their scrip is inscribed with a large text, and pilgrim's purse full of almighty dollars. I think of publishing a 'Manual of Early Lessons for Eminent Christians:' I. Do good so that not only your right hand knows it, but all your neighborhood likewise. II. Give as it shall be given unto you, and not unless you know it will be. III. Strain very hard at a sin the size of a gnat if it be your poor relation's, and swallow one the size of a camel if it be your patron's. IV. Never pray in your closet, as no one will be the wiser, but go as high as you can on the house-top, that society may think you the holiest man in Israel. V. Borrow of your friend without paying him, because he will not harm you, but be careful to give good interest to strangers, because they may have the law on you. VI. Judge very severely, that gaining applause for your condemnation of others you may contrive to hide your own shortcomings. VII. Eat pâtés de foie gras in secrecy, but have jours maigres in public, that men who cannot see you in secret may reward you openly. I could write a whole paraphrase of the Gospel as used and translated by the 'Church of England,' and other elect of the kingdom of Heaven; an election, by the way, exceedingly like that of Themistocles, where every man writes down his own name first, entirely regardless of lack of right or qualification for the honor."

"But different in this respect," said Alma, "that there the generals *did* remember to put Themistocles after them, whereas the shining lights of the different creeds are a great deal too occupied with securing their own future comfort to think of drawing any of their confrères up with them. The churches all take a cross for their symbol; they would be nearer the truth if they took the beam without the transverse, for egotism is much nearer their point than self-sacrifice. But will you look at my pet picture?"

I know I need not ask *you* to tell me candidly what *you* like and don't like in it."

The picture she spoke of stood with its face to the wall. As she turned it round, De Vigne and I gave an involuntary exclamation of surprise, it so far surpassed anything we should have fancied a girl of her age could have accomplished. It was in water-colors, but her master had been one of the first artists in Rome, and she had acquired under him a brilliance and delicacy of finish rarely seen. The picture was one not possible to criticise chilly by exacting rules of art and of perspective. One looked at it as Murillo looked at the first Madonna of his wonderful mulatto, not to discuss critically, but to admire the genius stamped upon it, to admire the vivid breathing vitality, the delicate grace, and wonderful power marked upon its canvas.

De Vigne looked at it silently while Alma spoke; he continued silent some minutes after she had ceased. He was not rassotté of art as Sabretasche was, but he was passionately fond of talent wherever he found it, and he was a good judge of painting; no one could have imposed a mediocre thing upon him. He stood silently, as I say, looking at her work; then he turned suddenly:

"Alma, if you choose, you can be as great a woman as Elizabeth Sirani—a greater than Rosa Bonheur, because what she gives to horses and cows you will give to human nature. Be content. Whatever sorrows or privations come to you, you will have God's best gift, which no man can take away, the greatest prize in life—genius!"

Alma looked up at him, her blue eyes brilliant as diamonds and dark as a summer sky at midnight, her whole face flushed, her lips trembling with delight.

"You think so. Thank God! I would have died to hear you say that!"

Better live to prove it," said De Vigne, mournfully. Her enthusiasm struck a sad chord in his heart. "Your picture is both well conceived and well carried out; it tells its own story; the imagining of it is poetic, the treatment artistic. There are faults, no doubt, but I like it too well to look out for them, and for your age I regard it as a marvel. Will you let me have it at my house a little while? I have some friends who are artists, others who are really learned cognoscenti, and I should like to hear their opinion on it."

"Will you keep it?" asked Alma, with the first shyness I had seen in her. "If you would hang it anywhere in your house—an attic, or anything—and just look at it now and then, I shall be so glad. Will you?"

"I will keep it with pleasure, my dear child," answered De Vigne, with a surprised smile; "but I will keep it as I would Landseer's, or Mulready's, by being allowed the pleasure of adding it to my collection. Your picture is worth——"

"Oh, don't talk of 'worth!'" cried Alma, vehemently. "Take it—take it, as I give it to you, with all my heart. I am so glad to give you anything, you were so kind to *him*!"

And at the remembrance of her grandfather poor little Alma leaned against her easel, covered her bright eyes with her hands, and sobbed aloud, unrestrainedly, and passionately, like her nature. She was too instinctively well-bred, however, not to do her best to suppress them, and, brushing away her tears, she looked up at De Vigne.

"Don't be angry with me, I can't help it when I think of grandpapa; he loved me so much, and I have nobody to love me now. Did he say anything in his letter that I might hear?"

De Vigne turned quickly:

"Did you not read it? It was unsealed."

"Read it? No! Why, it was addressed to you. You could not think for a moment that another person's letter was less sacred to me because it happened to be unsealed! That is not your own code, I should say. What right have you to suppose me more dishonorable than yourself?"

Her eyes sparkled dangerously, the color was hot in her cheeks, the imputation had roused her spirit, and really her fiery indignation was as becoming as it was amusing.

"I beg your pardon. I was wrong," said De Vigne. "You have a man's sense of honor, not a woman's. I am glad of it. Your grandpapa says very little. You say he died on the morning of the 10th of May; my letter was written on the evening of the 9th, and his powers failed him before he finished it. It was merely to ask me if I met you to be your friend. It is little enough I can ever aid you in, and my friendship will be of little use to you, but, such as it is, it will be yours, if you like to take it."

She held her hand out to him by way of answer; there were too many tears in her voice for her to trust herself to say anything.

"You do not remember your parents at all?" asked De Vigne.

She shook her head:

"I remember no one but grandpapa, and no home but Weive Hurst. Sometimes I have a sort of memory of a woman with fair hair, whom I called mamma, but whom I was afraid of, and of a place not unlike Lorave, with myrtles and orange-trees; but it must be only the memory of a dream, I think, for nurse told me both papa and mamma died when I was a baby, and that grandpapa could never bear me to mention them to him: I don't know why. How happy I was at Weive Hurst! I wonder if I shall ever be like that again?"

"To be sure you will," said De Vigne, kindly. "You

have a capacity for happiness, and are gay under heavy clouds; at eighteen no one has said good-by to all the sunshine of life. *I* must say good-by, though, or *I* shall not be back in town in time for mess. The hours slip away fast in chat; but promise me one thing, that, till *I* see you again, you will not ruin your eyesight over that easel before and after it is light. Only paint while the day is bright; you will do yourself more injury than you dream of in that over-close application. Walk every day that is fine, and give yourself some hours of *délassement*. You are fond of reading?"

"Passionately; but *I* read so much as a child, that *I* am almost blasée de littérature. *I* seem to have read, in English, French, and Italian, all that is really worth reading—all that is now in my reach at least, for now the rare old works and the best modern are not attainable, for the circulating libraries do not keep them. *I* am very fond of the French memoirs. What is more amusing than Saint-Simon and De Montespan? And *I* like metaphysical and psychological works—Buckle's, and Bain's, and Stuart Mill's."

De Vigne smiled. "As your taste, like your notions of honor, are a man's and not a woman's, and somehow resemble mine, perhaps my library can suit you better than the circulating ones. We will see! And now good-by, Miss Tressillian."

"Don't call me Miss Tressillian, pray," cried Alma, plaintively; "that is something quite new, and very horrible; everybody calls me Alma, and so must you. Good-by, and thank you much. Don't go and see Miss Molyneux and forget all about me. She has plenty of friends, you know, and *I* have none."

"That little Tressillian is charming," said *I*, as we left the house. "Don't you think her very amusing?"

"Yes," said De Vigne, with a smile, "it does amuse one

to hear her; it is refreshing, after the vapid inanities and limited intelligence of 'finished' young ladies, to find a little thing who can talk and think like that. She is perfectly original, certainly, and it is a pity there are not more of the stamp."

"I like her," said I, "because she has the gayety, frankness, and abandon of a child, with the quick wit, satire, and knowledge of a woman of the world, and that union is uncommonly rare. I wish there were more women like Victor Hugo's friend, 'Homme par la pensée et femme par le cœur.' The mistake they always make is, in imagining their education finished when in truth it has only just begun. What a girl learns up to sixteen or seventeen is only the merest A B C of knowledge. They are not allowed to read this, because it is 'improper;' nor that, because it is 'irreligious;' nor the other, because it is 'not fit for young persons;' till the result is, that they read nothing—great writers not being exactly accustomed to suppress their opinions, mince their words, and shut out human nature, to suit the capacities of school girls or the pruderies of school-mistresses. If their education is so limited, how should their minds choose but be limited also? Give me a woman like our little friend yonder, who has something of our own range of studies and ideas, to whom one can talk on equal terms, and not have to go down from all subjects of interest, or value, to the gathering together of on dits and the consideration of bagatelles, as uninteresting as they are unimproving."

"Little Alma makes you quite eloquent," said De Vigne, smiling. "I fully agree with you, if women were more capable of participation in our thoughts and studies, we should not seek their society as we now do, only to make love to them. Women complain that their husbands, and brothers, and fathers, leave them for clubs and men's

society. The fault lies chiefly in themselves. It is only a lover, and only then one in the first 'rosy flush' of enchantment, who does not weary of soft lips that can only utter monosyllables, and almond eyes that can only look a vacuous 'Plait-il?' to all his allusions. Alma is original; the worse for her, poor child! Women will hate, and men take advantage of her; if she were in society, our sex would go mad *about* her, and her own mad *against* her. I wonder what will become of her. I doubt if she will be happy; your exceptional natures scarcely ever are, though certainly she is lively enough under difficulties, with none of the amusements natural to her age. I wish you'd marry her, Arthur—it would be such a kindness. And yet I wouldn't ask you such a sacrifice, you're too good for a married man."

"Bien obligé, I never intend to be; but if I ever should, I hope my wife would not look on you with such admiring eyes as Alma does."

He laughed. "My dear fellow! do you expect to have a Guenevere who has no Launcelot? I shouldn't have thought you so Quixotic. If ever you marry, you must make up your mind to play second; and if your wife has no more harmful penchant than the little Tressillian's will ever be for me, you may congratulate yourself indeed!"

The morning after, while De Vigne was breakfasting, the cart that brought in Mrs. Lee's home-made bread to town left at his house Alma's picture; she had looked, I suppose, for his address in the Court Guide, and remembered her promise, though I am afraid the recipient of her gift had forgotten the subject altogether.

When it came, however, he hung it in a good light, and pointed it out to Sabretasche, who dined with him that night, to meet a mutual Paris friend.

"What do you think of that picture, Colonel?" he said,

as we came into the drawing-room for a rubber. Whist was no great favorite with De Vigne; he preferred the rapidity and exciting whirl of loo or lansquenet; but he played it well, and Sabretasche and De Cassagnac were especially fond of it. It suited the Colonel to lean back in a soft chair, and make those calm, subtle combinations. He said the game was so deliciously tranquil and silent!

Sabretasche set down his coffee-cup, put his glass in his eye, and lounged up to it.

"Of this water-color? I like it exceedingly. Where did you get it? It is not the style of any one I know; it is more like one of your countrymen's, Cassagnac, eh? It wants toning down; the light through that stained window is a trifle too bright, but the boy's face is perfect. I would give something to have idealized it; and the hair is as soft as silk. I like it extremely, De Vigne. Where did you get it?"

"I picked it up by accident. It pleased my eye, and I wanted to know if my eye led me right. I know you are a great connoisseur of those things."

"There is true power in it, and an exquisite delicacy of touch. The artist is young, isn't he? Do you know him?"

"Slightly. He works for his livelihood, and is only eighteen."

"Eighteen? By Jove! if the boy goes on as he has begun he will beat Maclise and Ingres. Has he ever tried his hand at oils?"

"I don't know, I'm sure."

"It's a pity he shouldn't. He works for his livelihood, you say? If he will do me a picture as good as this, leaving the subject to himself, I will give him fifty guineas for it, if he thinks that sufficient. Some day, when we have nothing better to do, you will take me to his studio--a

garret in Poland Street, probably, is it not? Those poor devils! How they live on bread and cheese and a pipe of bird's-eye, I cannot conceive! If the time ever come when I have my turbot and hock no longer, I shall resort to an overdose of morphia. What is the value of life when life is no longer enjoyment?"

"Yet," suggested De Vigne, "if only those were alive who enjoyed living, the earth would be barren very speedily, I fancy."

"That depends on how you read enjoyment," said De Cassagnac.

"Enjoyment is easily enough defined—taking pleasure in things, and having things in which to take pleasure. Some men have the power to enjoy, and not the opportunity; others the opportunity, and not the power; the combination of both makes the enjoyment, I take it."

"But enjoyment is a very different thing to different men. Enjoyment, for Sabretasche, lies in soirées, like the Gore House, or Madame de Sablé's, wine as good as your claret, women as pretty as La Violette, good music, good painting, and immeasurable dolce. Enjoyment lies, for Professor Owen, in the fossil tooth of an ichthyosaurus; for an Italian lazzarone, in sun, dirt, and macaroni; for a woman, in dress, conquests, and tall footmen; for the Tipton Slasher, in the belt, undisputed: enjoyments are as myriad as the stars."

"I know what you mean, my dear fellow," said Sabretasche, dropping his eye-glass, and taking up his cup again. "You mean that Hodge, the bricklayer, goes home covered with whitewash, sits down to Dutch cheese, with the brats screaming about, with the same relish as I sit down to my very best-served dinner. It is true, so far, that I should rather be in purgatory than in whitewash, should turn sick at the cheese, murder the children, and kill my own self

afterward, and that Hodge, by dint of habit and blunted senses, can support life where I should end it in pure self-defense. But I do not believe that Hodge enjoys himself—how should he, poor wretch! with not a single agrément of life? He does not know all he misses, and he is not much better than the beast of the field; but at the same time he only endures life, he can't be said to enjoy it. I agree with De Vigne, that there is but one definition of enjoyment, and the 'two handfuls, with quiet and contentment of spirit,' is a poetic myth, for poverty and enjoyment can by no means ever run in tandem."

"And contentment is another myth," added De Vigne. "If a man has all he wants, he is contented, because he has no wish beyond, and is a happy man; if he has not what he wants, and is conscious of something lacking, he cannot be called contented, for he is not so."

"Just so. I don't look to be contented, that is not in the lot of man; all I ask are the agréments and refinements of life, and without them life is a curse. Neither Diogenes, limiting himself to cabbages and water, nor Alexander, drunk with the conquest of the empires, were one bit more contented at heart than the other. Discontent prompted the one to quit mankind and cast off wealth, the other to rule mankind and amass wealth."

"And, after all, there is no virtue in contentment, since contentment is satisfaction in one's lot; there is far more virtue in endurance—strong, manful, steady endurance—of a fate that is adverse, and one admits to be such, but against which one still fights hard. Patience is all very well, but pluck is better," said De Vigne. "The tables are set. Shall we cut for partners? You and Cassagnac! Chevasney and I may give ourselves up for lost!"

"I am fond of Sabretasche," said De Vigne, as the Colonel and De Cassagnac left, about twelve, the former to

keep a promise he had made to Violet Molyneux to attend her mother's soirée that evening—the singular intercourse between them, and that strange compact, “not to go beyond friendship,” had only served to draw them nearer to friendship's deadliest foe, and the hours they passed asunder began to grow dangerously wearisome to one, if not to both. “I am fond of Sabretasche. There's a wonderful charm about that fellow; he makes one like him, though he would make out that he likes no one. Say what he will, there is a nobility and generosity at bottom that one can always trust. He does hate trouble; but I never went to him yet to exert himself to help anybody but what he did it—did it as I like people to do things, not ostentatiously, but quietly and liberally. It was he, you know, who helped me to get poor old Tressillian's consulship; and didn't you notice his first impulse, when he thought my young artist wanted money, was to give an order, though, with his Giorgiones and Claudes, of course he no more wants a little water-color than this retriever. People call him a raffiné voluptuary, a profound egotist, and all the rest of it. Bah! I only wish his detractors were one-half as reliable, as generous-hearted, and as delicate in generosity as he is. Il fait la vie, il s'amuse, as Cassagnac would say; but I know, if I were down in the world and wanted help, if I wished for a gift given by the right hand and not known by the left, if I needed a man of honor who would tell me no lies and betray me no confidence, to which I would rather go—to Sabretasche, though he may be a mauvais sujet, or my Lord Savinggrace, though he is a model of piety. But then Sabretasche, though he never pretends to be moral, does remember to be a man of honor, which your very moral and immaculate gentlemen singularly often forget.”

“True enough! The Colonel would make himself out

the perfection of egotism, but I have often known him thinking and acting for others, with a kindliness and unselfishness very rare in this world. Do you remember the trouble he took, when little Duncombe was in that mess about his money, to get the boy out of the Jews' hands and have him gently handled? and yet, if there is a thing Sabretasche hates, it is business matters of any kind, or contact with the under-bred canaille of the world. Like you, I am fond of the Colonel, as women say; but I often fancy he is not a happy man—don't you?"

"Happy," repeated De Vigne, with a stir of his fire. "No, I don't suppose he is; few men are. The one-half spoil life, the other half are spoiled by life; some are strangled by an adverse position, from which they cannot escape; others, born with the fairest prospects, mar them by their own self-will, folly, or vice. As for Sabretasche, I dare say, if you asked most people, they would tell you he is the *bien aimé* of fortune, if ever a man was; so he would seem, leader of ton, wit, critic par excellence as he is, with his talent and his taste, his *bonnes fortunes* and his wealth. But I dare say, if we knew all about him, there are pages doubled down in his life that he wouldn't care to have reopened, and has done follies in his past years that still cling to his present. There are sure to be; no man going is without some dark score or other, often written down for him by others' hands, to which he would not willingly refer. Sabretasche is no exception to the rule, most likely, and no thoughtful man can live to forty without being saddened to a certain degree, if it were only by the trickery and artifice he sees going on around him in all grades and under all colors, and Sabretasche, indolent though he may be, sees very keenly through his eyeglass."

"Which you won't allow to light on the little Tressilliau,

eh? Why did you let him go off in the idea it was a young artist in Poland Street?"

"Less for Sabretasche himself than all the others," responded De Vigne; "though, to be sure, with those *bonnes fortunes* of his I spoke of just now, and certain stories we know of him, little Alma is probably better without his acquaintance than with it."

"Hallo! if we go by *bonnes fortunes* and such-like reputations, are you a much more eligible friend for her than the Colonel?"

"Not at all. I have been no saint, God knows; *en même temps*, I am, thank Heaven, a man of honor, and with the trust Tressillian, of whom Sabretasche knew nothing, placed in me when he wrote that letter, and my knowledge of him in my boyhood, to say nothing of her own guilelessness and unprotected position, the child would be as safe with me as with her brother, even if I had not done with love and all its madness."

Done with love at thirty-five! But De Vigne meant what he said fully, at the least then: he meant and he believed it. He had vowed never to surrender himself to even a passing taste of that delirium which had already cost him so much, and meant to devote his life to the Service, which he had loved from the day he entered it, and which could alone give him the excitement and the action he coveted. Done with love at thirty-five! I looked at him as the fire-light shone on his face, with its haughty lines and its passionate eyes, and I thought he would one day reap the folly of his defiance, as he had already done of his surrender to the passion he now renounced. He did not think much about the little Tressillian, possibly; still she was to a degree a source of interest to him; she appealed to his kindness and his generosity, the only two levers by which De Vigne, so long won by his eye and his passions and his im-

pulses, was now to be moved. Boughton Tressillian had been kind to him in his boyhood, it would have been impossible to his nature not to have returned the kindness to Boughton Tressillian's little pet, now that the once heiress of Weive Hurst was moneyless, forsaken, friendless, and all alone in the world, dependent, poor child, upon her own exertions for a livelihood, and exposed to all the peines fortes et dures of poverty. Alma was calculated to disarm him, too. He never thought of her as what she really was, a most fascinating woman, but as what she really was too, a playful, winning child, familiarly fond of him from gratitude and memory, but gifted with an intelligence so singularly deep, keen, liberal, and cultured, that absolutely in talking to her he forgot her sex, and spoke to her and listened to her as he would have done to any man who chanced to have a turn of mind and a liberality of opinion akin to his own. To the line of Victor Hugo, which I already applied to Alma, "Homme par la pensée et femme par le cœur," one might have added, "et enfant par la franchise de l'esprit et l'abandon de la gaité." She was lively as one of her own pet kittens; she had all that elasticity of spirit, that wildness of gayety, which it is a great error to suppose do not very generally accompany intellects clearer and hearts deeper than those of the common herd; and lively as she was in her triste and uncongenial life, she would have been joyous indeed in a happy one, such as most girls at her early age lead. This in itself was the greatest attraction to De Vigne; his own nature was joyous, his spirits high, till they were crushed and chilled by his fatal marriage; he had that *love of fun* in him which is latent in all sweet and anti-morbid characters; he liked life and spirit in his dogs, his horses, in everything; he liked them especially in women, whom he had always sought in proportion as they amused him. Alma's vivacity amused him

and refreshed him; and where he had been amused, De Vigne had always gone, without any thought of possible consequences to himself.

He went to see her three or four times. Once he stopped there en route to lunch at the Star and Garter; once he went to go over Strawberry Hill with her, amused with the romantic souvenirs she poured into his ear; once or twice he went over to see her in the early noon. Whenever he had been in town he had been in the habit of spending an hour or two occasionally in Richmond Park or Windsor Forest in the morning, to have a snatch of the fresh woodland air amidst the hurry and heat of the season; and seven miles was soon covered with his slashing stride, that had carried him across the Himalayas and the Pyrenees, up the Tyrol, and over the Col du Géant. About a month after we had chanced on the little Tressillian, the day looked sunny and bright, and when he had done his breakfast and his *Times*, De Vigne, who was fond of walking, took his stick, whistled his terriers, and walked across to Richmond before any of his set were up, or, at least, *visible*, thinking to himself he would go and see the little Tressillian. At the gate he met her, just coming out of the garden.

“Going for a walk?” asked De Vigne, as Alma welcomed him with that cordial épanchement du cœur natural to her with those whom she liked and was pleased to see.

“Yes, I was; but that is no consequence, and certainly no deprivation, this cold day. Do come in and talk to me.”

“No, thank you; I will walk and talk with you, if you like. I was going to take a look at the park after I had asked you how you were, so we can go together.”

They did go together. Alma delighted to have him for her companion; and very naturally, too, for there were few women in town, however admired and supercilious, who

would not have liked two hours' tête-à tête with De Vigne, though few would have shown it him so innocently and naturally. Alma, though with her Southern blood and her Lorave habits she did not admire walking in cold weather, enjoyed herself this morning, with the dogs scampering before her and De Vigne talking to her, while the wind blew a bright rose-color into her cheeks, and her dark-blue eyes beamed with the amusement and gladness inherent in her nature.

"Are you not very dull here, Alma?" he asked her, as they walked along through the park.

"Yes. I am not of a sufficiently superior mind to see the charms of solitude," she answered, laughing. "I am tired of the life I lead. I admit it fully, though I suppose if I were philosophic I should not yearn after the pomps and vanities, *alias* the refinements and the pleasures, of existence. My days are monotonous. I cannot tell one from the other. I have no friends, no amusements, no society, nor can I obtain them in any way. I cannot make a fortune all at once. I cannot run up to some grande dame, and say to her, 'Introduce me into your circle; I want to belong to the crème de la crème.' I cannot free myself any more than a goldfinch caught and caged can free itself, and go back to its beloved chestnut boughs. Yes, Major De Vigne, I am very dull—I admit it—except, indeed, when you come to see me."

"Poor little thing!" said De Vigne, involuntarily, as he pushed some brambles out of her path with his cane. "Well, you have read Monte Christo! You must remember his last words."

"'Attendre et espérer'?" repeated Alma. "To me they are the saddest words in human language. They are so seldom the joy-bells to herald a new future—they are so often the death-knell to a past wasted in futile striving and

disappointed desire. 'Attendre et espérer!' How many beaux jours pass in trusting to those words; and when their trust be at last recompensed, how often the fulfillment comes too late to be enjoyed. It always irritates me to hear people say it is good for youth to bear privation; they can repose in their old age. Do those moralists never stop to remember what it is to have your youth marred by adverse circumstances, cramped by straitened means, passing away from you?—all your beaux jours, all the spring-time of your life, passing away without your being allowed to gather one of the flowers growing by its highway, gliding from your hands unblessed, unenjoyed, without a single glimpse of that insouciant gladness which seems its heritage—gliding, never to return? 'Attendre et espérer!' Ah! that is all very well for those who have some fixed goal in view—some aim which they will attain if they have but energy and patience enough to go steadily on to the end; but only to wait for an indefinite better fate, which year after year retreats still farther—only to hope against hope for what never comes, and in all probability will never come—*that* is not quite so easy."

"If it is not, it is the lot of all," answered De Vigne. "However favored by fortune, take my word for it, no man's or woman's life turns out in any way what they dreamt and wished it in their première jeunesse. The young beauty at eighteen or twenty, entering the world with all her ideals hot-pressed from the leaves of Jocelyn or Evangeline, dreams of some romantic and love-blessed future, and, a season or two afterward, ends in a marriage for position. In tender moments afterward, no doubt she will now and then recall those by-gone idyls of her girlhood with a sigh."

"But her fate is of her own carving," interrupted Alma. "She cannot charge life with the result of her own actions and ambitions."

“That does not follow. Education, custom, surroundings, the bias of her birth, the incitements of her friends, may all have had a good deal to do with it. But I was going to say that, though she may sigh—on the eternal principle that a bunch of currants we cannot have seems sweeter than a cluster of the finest hot-house grapes à la main—for the unfulfilled desires and visions of her youth, it is a great doubt whether she would have been a quarter so happy if they had been fulfilled. A love-match and a limited income would have banished her fancy for romance quite as effectually and more painfully than the entourages of wealth, prosaic though they may seem to you. But as for your *attendre et espérer*, I agree with you, nothing chafes and frets one more than waiting; it wears all the bloom off the fruit to waste all our golden hours gazing at it afar off, and longing for it with Tantalus thirst. It has never suited me. I have too often brushed the bloom off mine plucking them too soon; and, as for hope, she may figure well in Collins’s ode; but as we go on in life, we know there is nothing more delusive than the flutter of her shadowy wings, which lead us on as the Willis of the German legends lure men, with their silvery hair and sylphide forms, to dance on the very border of their tombs. I agree with you, to wait for happiness is a living death, to hope for it is a dreamer’s phantasy; but it is not like *your* usual doctrine, you little enthusiast, who are still such a child that you believe in the possible realization of all your fond ideals. What were you saying to me the other day at Strawberry Hill about Chatterton, that if the poor boy had only had the courage to wait and hope, he might have reaped long years of honor and of fame?”

“But Chatterton had an aim; and he had more: he had the godlike gift of genius, which gives to the hearts of all signaled by its touch a beauty and a glory that no wrong,

no trial, no suffering can ever take away I know he was goaded to madness by poverty. I know how bitter to that boy, with his fervid imaginings, his poet's longings, his beautiful day-dreams, must have been the weary fret of thinking what he should eat, and wherewithal he should be clothed, the jar and grind of every-day wants, of petty yet inexorable cares, so wearing even to most common and the most narrowed minds. I can well believe how they wore into his soul and bowed his young head down to the grave, as the only home that would open for him to rest from the cruel wear and jar of the world, that seemed so cold to him. At the same time, I wonder that he did not live for his works; that for their sake he did not suffer and endure; that the strong genius in him did not give him power and courage to struggle against all that strove to crush it; that he did not live to make the world acknowledge all that marked him out from the common herd. I know how he wearied of life; yet I wish he had conquered it. It always makes me sad to think that genius should be trampled down by the injustice and the petty cruelties of the world. Genius should ever be stronger than its detractors. 'What is the use of my writing poetry that no one reads?' asked Shelley. Yet he knew that the time would come when it would be read by men wiser than those of his generation, and he wrote on, following the inspiration of his own divine gift. Men know and acknowledge now *how* divine a gift it was."

"True," answered De Vigne; "wrestle with fate, and it will bless you, is a wise and a right counsel; still here and there in that wrestling-match it is possible to get a *croc en jambe*, which leaves us at the mercy of Fate, do what we may to resist her. Men of genius have very rarely been appreciated in their own time. Too often nations spend wealth upon a monument to him whom they let die for

want of a shilling. Too many, like Cervantes, have lacked bread while they penned what served to make their country honored and illustrious. They could write of him:

Porque se digua qua uno mano herida
Pudo dar à su dueño eterna vida:

but they could leave him to poverty for all that. Johnson must dine behind the screen, while Beau Nash reigns King of the Wells. It must ever be so, as long as the world is divided as it is into twenty who like ombre and basset, small-talk and shoe-buckles, to only one here and there who cares for satire and wisdom. A prophet has no honor in his own country, still less in his own time; but if the prophets be true and wise men, they will not look for honor, but follow Philip Sydney's counsel, look in their own hearts and write, and leave the seed of their brain as plowmen the corn in the furrows—content that it will bring forth a harvest at the last, if it be ripe, good wheat."

"Yet it is sad if they are forced to see only the dark and barren earth, and the golden harvest only rise to wave over their tomb!"

"It is; but, petite, there are few things *not* sad in life, and one of the saddest of them is, as Emerson says, 'the madness with which the passing age mischooses the object on which all candles shine and all eyes are turned,' registering every trifle touching Elizabeth, and Leicester, and Essex, and passing over, without a note, 'the popular player, in whom none foresees the poet of the human race.' The populace who crowded to look at Charles and Louise de Kerroualle coming to Hampton never knew or thought of Cromwell's Latin secretary, dictating in his study, old, blind, and poor. Well, it only shows us what fools men are, either to court the world or care for it! Apropos of célèbres, Alma, you, vouée as you are to historic associa-

tions, should never be dull here, with all the souvenirs that are round Richmond and Twickenham."

"Ah!" said Alma, turning her bright beaming face on him, "how often I think of them all!—of the talk round that little deal table in the grotto, spiced with the same wit that gave its sting to the *Dunciad* and its sparkle to the *Essay*; of Swift, with his brilliant azure eyes, and his wonderful satire, and his exigent selfish man-like loves; of Mrs. Clive, with her humorous stories; and Harry Fielding, laughing as he wrote the scenes men still cite as master-pieces, and packing away his papers to eat his scrag of mutton as gleefully as if it were an *entremêt*; and Walpole, with his medieval tastes and modern fashions, fitting up a Gothic chapel and writing for a Paris suit, publishing '*Otranto*,' and talking scandales in Boodle's—how often I think of them!"

"You need not tell me that," laughed De Vigne. "I have not forgotten all your romantic souvenirs at the mere view of the sites of Strawberry Hill and Pope's villa. With your historic passion, you live in the past. Well! it is safer and less deceptive, if not less visionary, than living in the future."

"Perhaps I do both; yet I have little to hope from the future."

"Why?" said De Vigne, kindly. "Who knows but what one of your old favorites, the fairies, may bring good gifts to their little queen? We will hope so, at least."

Alma shook her head. "I am afraid not. The only fairy that has any power now is Money, and the good gifts the gods give us now-a-days only go to those who have golden coffers to put them in. Yes, I do live in the past; my future I cannot trust. I very seldom look at it, save in wild delicious fancies, which, I fear, will never come true; but the past—I love to go back to it, with its quaint Vandyke portraits, and its rich Velasquez coloring, and its

chiar'oscuro of time, which gives it a dim golden haze that was probably never its own. I think the company of Commynes and Froissart, Saint-Simon, and Hervey, and Walpole, better, after all, than many of the circles of modern society. I like to go back into the past through the quaint word-painting of an old chronicle, or the deep rich hues of a Murillo or a Velasquez. I love those dim yet brilliant pictures of by-gone days that poetry and history weave together. They are all living to me—those grave and stately signori who condemned Faliero; those silent resolute Netherlanders who gathered in the market-place to see Lamoral d'Egmont die with his Golden Fleece around his neck, the gift of his tiger-king; those gay and glittering crowds of haughty noblesse that filled the palaces of the Bourbons, and laughed at the malicious wit of Athenais de Montespan, with her 'dove's eye and serpent's tongue;' those dandies and beauties who dressed for Ranelagh and clapped the 'Beggar's Opera,' and followed the lead of Beaux Edgeworth and Nash, Fielding and Brummel, copying the tie of their cravats one hour, and letting them languish in prison the next; those wits and celebrities whose mots still sparkle through the dry pages of memoirs, and gleam through the yellow faded leaves of their letters,—they are all living to me, Sir Folko! as living as if I heard the rustle of their silks, and the ring of their jeux de mots, and the glitter of their stars and orders!"

He laughed. It amused him unspeakably to hear her talk. If she had chosen to go on for an hour, I don't believe he would ever have stopped her.

"I often think," Alma went on, "what pride and gratification it must be to any man—to you, for instance—to look back on a long line of noble ancestry. It must give you a glow of a warmer feeling than pride; it must bring you a heritage of honor that none can take away; it must

make you love to live so as never to disgrace them, nor stain the name they have handed down to you?"

Her unconscious words struck with a keen sting into De Vigne's heart. He loved his gentleman's name, honored as it had been in by-gone generations by the talent, courage, and gallantry of his father's fathers. He was proud of his ancestry, as all men must be who have anything in them of a love for what is noble and worthy. He, in his boyhood, had vowed "to live so as never to disgrace them;" yet he had been the first of his line that had given it to one who dishonored it; he had been the first who had placed it in hands that degraded it! Alma's innocent words struck the chord of that bitter regret which was ever upon him—the stain of his marriage upon that name which had never before been borne save by women noble of birth and pure in life. He answered her with an effort. Unfulfilled aspirations, unkept resolves, unavailing regrets, rose up in him at her words.

"It *ought*—it does not follow that it *must*. What should be, rarely is, *petite*. Still I think with you: it were odd if the man who inherited intellect cultivated, manners refined, and honor held high through many generations, had not something better born in him with his pur sang than the man whose fathers were blackguards, thieves—God knows what—whose hands were dirty, and brains untutored, and names unknown and unvalued. But just now men of rank and breeding are selected only as the stalking-horse on which to exhibit *in terrorem* all the vices of the Decalogue and the law courts. In all the romances of the day—pandering to public taste, and written very often by people not within the pale of good society, ignorant of its ways and envious of its distinctions—the hero is invariably self-educated—other education is thought, I suppose, *de luxe*; and you are carefully assured that he never either

could, or would, or wished to be, attractive and well-bred, those being sybaritisms, and quite anterior to the rough 'muscular Christianity' of which he is certain to be an apostle. To write a book of what will be called a 'healthy' and 'moral' tone—a book that will 'go down' in religious circles, and be 'asked for' at circulating libraries—you must now be careful to select some brawny-armed carpenter, or hard-working 'self-made man'—you must throw in, into counter-position to him, a man of rank, blackguardly as the details of Bow Street police-court—you must balance in exact ratio the morality and purity of your under-bred man with the rascality and impossible villainy of your well-born enfant terrible—you must incline your heroine to the satanic beauty of your Lothario, but make her see her error, and take refuge in the arms of your Hercules. Such a plot, with a few stale apothegms, a night class, where your hero teaches the Gospel, or some moral philosophies, with a retributive end to your supposititious 'gentleman,' and a good scene at the finish of your ungainly but immaculate pet, with one eye burnt out in the conflagration of his mill or his workshop, and an open Bible laid out on his knee, your novel will be healthy, and, what healthy writers count on most, remunerative. Doubtless there are very estimable coal-merchants, most irreproachable carpenters; I am sure there are, though they don't happen to be in my set, and come across my path. No doubt a man who rises like Robert Peel, or Edward Sugden, or Douglas Jerrold, is a noble example in our generation, as Baptiste Colbert was in his; we can wish for none better, we can cite none more encouraging to young men of talent superior to their fortunes, and energy struggling against adverse circumstances. But, because a man *has* risen from the ranks, it is very far from following that he must necessarily have risen by right means or worthy steps. Very often it

is quite the contrary; it is very generally by chicanery and fraud, by doing very dirty jobs, by kicking down each round of the ladder by which they have profited, by squeezing every farthing out of widows and orphans, by unseen swindling and robbery under the rose: because a man is a 'self-made man,' it does not follow that the tools he has used are those for which we should laud him."

"No," answered Alma; "it is a curious fancy of the present day, that the mud of the gutter must purify, and the blue blood of the stately escutcheons must stain; and it is as curious a paradox that the very authors who, in writing of some historic site, dwell with such ecstasies on the nobility and heroism of those who made it famous, try to sneer down, with a savage cut at aristocracy, the descendants of the men they eulogize. If great deeds give such an aroma to woods and hills, mortar and stone, surely they may give some to the inheritors of their blood and their name. It is singular, as you say, to see the universal type adopted in all novels of the present day. *Your* class is never represented, or at least never fairly."

De Vigne laughed:

"No; the romancists only take our class to vilify it, and lead it out as a *bête noire* or a scarecrow. The soldier or the man of rank is scarcely ever represented as he *is* in any novel of the day; yet we are a large class—perhaps the best educated in the land—certainly one that has the most influence in many things; but military men are invariably made such under-bred fools as would be inadmissible in the society to which they belong, and of a 'gentleman'—*i.e.* a man of honor, birth, and high breeding, such as, though they may not be demigods or saints, one meets many, thank God! both in literary and patrician circles—the young men and maidens who rush into print would seem to have not the faintest notion, since if their char-

acters be meant to be of tolerable birth and manners, they load them with the vulgar tricks they see now and then detailed in the newspaper reports of some drunken ensign with his school-boy mischief still about him. There is a strange spite—for it really merits no higher term—against the aristocracy—not a just and sensible exposition, that brain, wherever it be found, whether under Chatham's coronet, or Burns's peasant bonnet, is equally worthy, and Watt studying steam by his aunt's cottage tea-kettle is as great in his way as Wellington planning the lines of Torres Vedras in his—but a smarting, envious, venomous spite, which decrees that good names in his past must make a man utterly unable to make great names for himself. We see the contrary around us every day; we have great statesmen, soldiers, men of letters, who give the lie to it. It is to men of birth and cultivation that the country is glad to come for its prime ministers and its cabinet counselors; yet the opticism holds its reign; and if a peer's son, once in a way, plays one of those harum-scarum, vulgar, practical jokes such as are not unknown, though unrecorded, among the young Browns, and Joneses, and Robinsons of the immaculate 'middle class,' pounce come all the little stinging flies and seize upon the offense, and hold it up to the eyes of the nation with angry snarl and coarse anathema against his Order, with as much wisdom and justice in their sweeping invective as those would show who called a merchant a bankrupt because his boy owed five shillings to a school-fellow he could not pay until next half. I take it, if one looked thoroughly into it, that the dissipations of the upper classes, on which these gentry, who find it 'the thing' to prate of 'pure lives' and 'spotless morals,' hold forth so severely of late, be, after all, worse in their way and in their fruits than the giant frauds, the *sub rosâ* robberies, the mercantile lies, the banking swindles, the professional

hypocrisies, the dishonest jesuitisms, perpetrated in the middle classes under the name of—Business. But I shall talk myself hoarse, and you deaf, Alma. One o'clock. We have absolutely been walking two hours. We must turn back, or I shall have you knocked up. You are not used to our cold March mornings."

"But I enjoy it so intensely," interrupted Alma, lifting her radiant face to his. "Won't you come in and have some luncheon? You dined often enough at Weive Hurst," she asked, as he held out his hand to her at the gate.

Luncheon is not disagreeable after three hours' walking. He went and took some of Mrs. Lee's admirably done cutlets, just served for Alma's little dinner, and he stayed till the afternoon sun was getting red in the west. Alma walked with him down the garden, and as he looked back and waved her an adieu, De Vigne could not help but confess that she made a pretty tableau leaning over the white gate, with little Sylvo in her arms.

He smiled as he walked along, cutting the brown grass with his cane. "She is a clever little thing," he thought to himself; "it is wonderfully amusing to talk to her. Poor child! it is a dull life for her there. Well! she is out of harm's way; in the world she would soon come to grief."

De Vigne was destined to remember, too late, that "*L'Amitié est l'Amour sans ailes*," and that the pinions may be sprouted and spread ere we even know of their growth.

PART THE ELEVENTH.

I.

HOW DE VIGNE AMUSES HIMSELF WITH FENCING, AND
NEVER DREAMS THE BUTTONS CAN FLY OFF.

DE VIGNE never did anything by halves, to use a sufficiently expressive, if not over-elegant, colloquialism. He hated and mistrusted women, not individually, as he ought to have done, but sweepingly, en masse. At the same time, there was in him, naturally, too much chivalry and generosity not to make him pity "Little Tressillian," and show her kindness to the best of his power. In the first place, the girl was all alone, and had no money—two facts which appealed to his delicacy and warmer feeling; in the second, he had known her as a little girl, still held her as such, indeed, and never thought of classing her among his detested "beau sexe;" in the third, the letter of Boughton Tressillian had in a way recommended her to his care, and, though De Vigne would have been the first to laugh at another man who, at thirty-five, had taken up a girl of eighteen as a protégée, and made sure no harm could come of it, he really looked on Alma as a child, though a very attractive and interesting child it is true, and would have stared at you if you had made his kindness to her the subject of one of those jests customary on the acquaintance of a man about town and an unprotected girl—like himself and "Little Tressillian." He *was* kind to her, for there was a deep spring of generosity and (where he liked people) of lavish kindness under the cynicism and chill reserve now gathered round him. As he had promised, he

picked out some of the choicest books of his library, his own favorites—not such as young ladies read generally, but such as it might be better if they did—and sent them to her, with the reviews and periodicals of the month. He sent her, too, one of his parrots, for her to teach, he said, she being such an admirable adept in the locutory art, and some flowers, to put her in mind of Weive Hurst.

“Her room looked so pitifully dull, poor child!” said he, one morning, when I was lunching with him. “Those flowers will brighten it up a little, and she’ll care for them more than I. Raymond, did you send Robert down with those things to Richmond?”

“Yes, Major.”

I chanced to look at the man as he spoke; he was the new valet, whom De Vigne thought such an acquisition. He was a smooth, fair-faced fellow, really gentlemanlike to look at, not, *ça va sans dire*, the “gentlemanism” of high breeding, but the gentlemanlyism of many an oily parson or sleek parvenu. There was a slight twinkle in his light eyes, and a quick, fox-like glance as he answered his master, which looked as if he at least attached some amusement to the Major’s acquaintance with the pretty little artiste at St. Crucis-on-the-Hill.

De Vigne never remembered the presence of servants; he thought they had no more eyes or ears than the chairs or tables around him. They served him as the plates or the glasses did, and they were no more than those to him; else, wise man as he was, he ought to have recollected that, if he wished to draw no notice upon Alma, he should not have sent his servants to her with books and flowers. More mischief, reports, and embrouillements have come from the prying eyes, coarse tongues, and second-hand slanders of those “necessary evils” than we ever dream of, for the buzz of the servants’ hall is often as poisonous as the subdued

murmur of the scandal-retailing boudoir above stairs. How it came about, I don't know, but Alma, some way or other, was not long kept *in petto*. Some three weeks after that, Sabretasche, Curly, Tom Severn, Vane Castleton, and one or two other men were at De Vigne's house. We had been playing Loo, his favorite game, and were now supping, between three and four, off all the delicacies and first-class wines his chef and cellar could offer us, chatting of two-year-olds and Derby books, of bons mots and beauties, of how Mademoiselle Fifine had fleeced Little Pulteney, and Bob Green's roan mare won a handicap for 200 sovs.—the talk that is chatted over a late supper-table and choice champagne cup, in real life; though, no doubt, real life is shockingly frivolous, and all wrong altogether, and we *ought*—though you know we never *do*—out of “healthy novels” of “muscular Christianity” (by the way, what may that mean?) to have been puzzling out our several missions, discussing how to Christianize India, analyzing the Origin of Species, or blackening everybody else's character and whitening our own, which is, I believe, the received recipe for “regenerating” society.

It was curious to see the difference between men's outer and inner lives. There was Sabretasche lying back in the very easiest chair in the room, witty, charming, urbane, with not a trace on his calm, delicate features of the care within him that he had bade Violet Molyneux not tempt him to unveil; there was Tom Severn, of the Queen's Bays, with twenty “*in re's*” hanging over his head, and a hundred “little bills” on his mind, going to the dogs by express train, who had been playing away as if he had had Barclay's to back him; there was Wyndham, with as dark and melancholy a past as ever pursued a man, a past of which I know he repented, not in ostentatious sackcloth and ashes, but bitterly and unfeignedly in silence and hu-

military, tossing down Moët's with a gay laugh and a ready jest, as agreeable in the card-room as he was eloquent in the Lower House; there was Charlie Fitzhardinge, who, ten years ago, had accidentally killed his youngest brother, a Benjamin tenderly and deeply loved by him, and had never ceased to be haunted by that fair distorted face, laughing and chatting as if he had never had a care on his shoulders; there was Vane Castleton, the worst, as I have told you, of all Tiara's sons, a fellow without heart, honor, or conscience, fatal to women and disliked by men—with his low voice, his fair, smooth brow, his engaging address, nobody would have thought he would have hurt a fly, yet we called him butcher, because, in his petty malignity, he had hamstrung a luckless mare of his for not winning a Sweepstakes he had intended her, and had shot dead the young brother of a girl, the daughter of a clergyman, (whom he had eloped with, and left three weeks after without a shilling to help herself,) for trying, poor boy! to revenge the faithless cruelty to his sister; there was De Vigne—yet, no, De Vigne's face was type true enough of his character—a character reserved, by nature very frank and haughty, generous as the winds, but impetuous, passionate, and proud; in the sleeping fire of his eyes and the iron command of his brow, with the strong, straight arch of its eyebrows, was the visible stamp of an unquiet fate.

“Halloa, De Vigne,” began Tom Severn, at supper, “a pretty story this is about you, you sly dog! So this painter of yours we were all called in to admire a little time ago is a little concealed Venus, eh?”

De Vigne looked up from helping me to some mayonnaise.

“Explain yourself, Tom; I don't understand you.”

“*Won't* understand, you mean. You know you've a little beauty locked up all to yourself in a farm-house at Rich-

mond, and never have told it to your bosom friends Shockingly shabby of you, De Vigne, to show us that water-color and let us believe it was done by a young fellow in Poland Street. However, I suppose you don't want any rivals poaching on your manor, and the girl is à ravir, we're told, so we must forgive you, eh?"

De Vigne looked supremely disdainful and a little annoyed.

"Pray, my dear Severn, may I ask where you picked up this cock-and-bull story?"

"Oh yes. Winters, and Egerton, and Steele were making chaff about it in the Army and Navy this morning, saying Hercules had found his Omphale, and they were glad of it, for Dejanira was a devil!"

The blood flushed over De Vigne's white forehead as Severn, in the thoughtlessness of his heart, spoke what *he* meant as good nature; even yet he could not hear unmoved the slightest allusion to the Trefusis, the one disgrace upon his life, the one stain upon his name.

"How *they* heard it I can't tell you," said Severn; "you must ask 'em. Somebody saw the girl looking after you at the gate, I believe. She's a deuced pretty little thing, ain't she?—trust you for that, though—with golden hair, I think. *I* like golden hair myself, it's so out of the common, and makes a woman look like a walking sunbeam. But what do you call it a cock-and-bull story for? It's too likely a one for you to deny it with any chance of our believing you, and Heaven knows why you should try. You may hate women now, but everybody knows you never forswore them. We are all shepherds here, as Robin Hood says."

De Vigne was annoyed: in the first place, that this report, which could but be detrimental to her, should, in so brief a time, already have circulated about himself and

poor little Alma; in the second, any interference with him or his pursuits or plans always irritated him exceedingly; in the third, he knew that if he ever disabused their minds of his having any connection with Alma, to know that a pretty little thing was living alone and unprotected was for these fellows to ferret her out immediately, to which her *métier* of professional artiste would give them the means at once. He was exceedingly annoyed, but he was too wise a man not to know that manifestation of his annoyance would be the surest way to confirm the gossip that had got about concerning them, which for himself, of course, didn't matter two straws.

He laughed slightly. "We are, it is true, Tom; nevertheless, there is a fawn here and there that it is the duty of all of us to spare; don't you know that? I assure you—and I have no need to ask any of you to believe my word—that the gossip you have heard is pure gossip, but gossip which annoys me, for this reason, that the lady who is the innocent subject of it is the granddaughter of a very old friend of mine, Tressillian, of Wiltshire, whom I met accidentally a few weeks ago. Her picture hangs in my room here, but merely because she wished to have Sabretasche's judgment upon it, of whom I had spoken to her as a dilettante and first-rate artist. Beyond, I have no interest in her, nor she in me, and for the sake of my dead friend, any insult to her name I shall certainly consider as though one to my own, for I respect Miss Tressillian as fully as if she were now in the rank and affluence her childhood was passed in, and I shall listen to measurable gossip about her as little as I should listen to it about any sister of mine, if I had one."

He spoke quietly and carelessly, but his words had weight. De Vigne had never been known to condescend to a lie, not even to a subterfuge or a prevarication, and

there was such a haughty *noli me tangere* air about him, that nobody thought of meddling with his concerns.

"All right, old fellow," said good-natured Tom Severn. "I didn't know, you see; fellows will talk."

"Of course they will," said De Vigne, eating his marinade leisurely; "and in nine times out of ten they would have been right. I never set up to be a pharisee, God knows. I'm a great deal too naughty a boy for that. However, I have no temptation now, for love affairs are no longer to my taste—I leave them to Corydons like Curly. As poetic individuals say, I have but one love, my sword, and if I can't have her, I am so constant I care for no other."

"But, hang it! De Vigne," said Vane Castleton, "Tom's description of this little Trevelyan, Trevanion—what is it?—is so delightful, if you don't care for her yourself, you might let your friends. Introduce us all, do."

"Thank you, Castleton," said De Vigne, dryly. "Though you are a Duke's son, I must say I don't think you a very desirable addition to a lady's acquaintance."

He cordially detested Castleton, than whom a vainer or more intensely selfish fellow never curled his whiskers and befooled women silly enough to be caught by his specious manners and purring voice, and he had only invited him because he had been arm-in-arm with Severn when De Vigne asked Tom that morning in Regent Street.

Lord Vane pushed his fine fair curls off his forehead—an habitual trick of his; his brow was very low, and his blond hair, of which he took immense care, was everlastingly falling across his eyes. "Jealous, after all! A trifle of the dog in the manger, eh? with all your philosophy and a—a—what do you call it, chivalry?" he said, with a supercilious smile.

I knew De Vigne was growing impatient; his eyes

brightened, his mouth grew set, and he pulled his left wristband over his wrist with a jerk. I think that left arm felt an intense longing in its muscles and sinews to "straighten from the shoulder;" with him, as with David, it was a great difficulty to keep the fire from "kindling." But he spoke quietly, very quietly for him; more so than he would have done if no other name than his own had been implicated in it; for he knew the world too well not to know, also, that to make a woman the subject of a dispute or a brawl is to do her the worst service you can.

"I am not a boy to interpret insult where no insult is dreamt of, so I shall not take your speech as it might be taken, Castleton," he said, gravely, with a scornful, haughty smile upon his lips. "My *friends* accept my word and understand my meaning; what *you* may think of me or not is really of so little consequence that I do not care to inquire your opinion."

Castleton's eyes scintillated with that cold unpleasant glare with which light-gray eyes sometimes kindle when angry. If he had been an Eton or Rugby boy, one would have called him "sulky;" for a man of rank and fashion the word would have been too small. A scene might have ensued, but Sabretasche—most inimitable tactician—broke the silence with his soft low voice:

"De Vigne, do you know that Harvey Goodwin's steel grays are going for an old song in the Yard? I fancy I shall buy them. Don't you think they would go well with the pair I bought the other day for my drag?"

So the conversation was turned, and little Alma Tresillian's name was dropped. Curly, however, half out of mechanceté, half because he never heard of a pretty woman without making a point of seeing her, never let De Vigne alone till he had promised to introduce him to her.

"Do, old fellow," urged Curly, "because you know I remember her at Weive Hurst, and she had such deuced lovely eyes then. Do! I promise you to treat her as if she were the richest heiress in the kingdom, and hedged round with a perfect abatis of chaperones. I can't say more!"

So De Vigne took him down, being quite sure that if he did not show him the way Curly would find it for himself, and knowing, too, that Curly, though he was a dandy, a "little wild," as good-natured ladies say, indolent, spoilt, and devil-may-care, was a true gentleman; and when a man is that, you may trust him, where his honor is touched or his generosity concerned, to break through his outer shell of fashion, ennui, and dissipation, and "come out strong" in his original inborn nature.

So De Vigne, as I say, took him down one morning, when we had nothing to do, to the little farm-house of St. Crucis. It was a queer idea, as conventionalities go, for a young girl to receive the visits of men like ourselves without any chaperone to protect her and play propriety; but the little lady was one out of a thousand; she could do things that no other woman could, and she welcomed us with such a mixture of frank and childlike simplicity, and the self-possession, ready wit, and perfect ease of a woman ten years her senior, and accustomed to society, that it was very pretty to see her. And we should have known but a very trifle of life and womanhood if we had not felt how utterly distant from boldness or forwardness of any kind was our Little Tressillian's charming vivacity and ingenuous candor—a vivacity that can only come from an intelligent mind, a candor that can only spring from a heart that thinks no ill because it means none. "To the pure all things are pure." True words! Many a spotless rain-drop gleams unsoiled on a filthy and betrodde trot-

toir; many a worm grovels in native mud beneath an unspotted and virgin covering of fairest snow.

It was really pretty to see Alma entertain her callers—three bien-aimés of fashionable sets, moreover, and fastidious to the last degree. She was perfectly natural, because she never thought about herself. She was delighted to see De Vigne, and happy to see us, as he had brought us—not quite as flattering a reason for our welcome as Curly and I were accustomed to receive; and in her dainty picturesque dress, (she still retained the taste for pretty toilettes, given her by Boughton Tressillian in her childhood,) sitting in her little low chair, Alma chatted with us all as easily and fluently as, but with much more simplicity and talent than, any Belgravian belle.

“Have you walked every day, Alma, as I told you?” said De Vigne.

“Not every day,” said Alma, penitentially. “I will when the summer comes; but the eternal spring upon my canvas is much dearer and more tempting to me than your chill and changeable English spring.”

“You are very naughty, then,” said De Vigne; “you will be sorry ten years hence for having wasted your health. What is your aim in working and working eternally like this?”

“To make money to buy my shoes, and my gloves, and my dresses. I have nobody to buy them for me, you know; that is aim practical enough to please you, is it not?”

“But that is not your only one, I fancy?” smiled Curly. “Miss Tressillian scarcely looks like the expounder of prosaic doctrine.”

“No; not my only one,” answered Alma, quickly, her dark-blue eyes lighting up under their silky and upcurled lashes. “They say there is no love more tender than the love of an artist for his work, whether he is author, painter,

or musician; and I believe it. For the fruit of your talent you bear a love that no one, save those who feel it, can ever attempt to understand. You long to strengthen your wings, to exert your strength, to cultivate your powers, till you can make them such as must command applause; and when I see a master-piece, of whatever genre, I worship with my whole heart the divinity of genius, and feel as if I should never rest till I, too, had laid some worthy offering upon the altar of art."

Ideal and enthusiastic as the words may seem, coldly considered, as little Alma spoke them, with her eloquent voice and gesticulation, and her whole face beaming with the earnestness of her own belief in what she said, we three men, quickest of all mortals to sneer at "sentiment," felt no inclination to ridicule here, but rather a sad regret for the cold winds that we knew would so soon break and scatter the warm petals of this bright, joyous, Southern flower, and gave a wistful backward glance to the time when we, too, had like thoughts—we, too, like fervor.

De Vigne felt it more, I believe, than either of us, but, as his wont was, he turned it with a laugh:

"Curly, you need not have started that young lady. In that fertile brain I ought to have warned you there is a powder-magazine of enthusiasm ready to explode at the mere hint of a firebrand, which one ought not to approach within a mile at the least. It will blow itself up some day in its own excessive energy, and get quenched in the world's cold water!"

"Heaven forefend!" cried Curly. "The enthusiasm, which you so irreverently compare to gunpowder, is too rare and too precious not to be taken all the care of that one can. If the ladies of the world had a little of such fire, we, their sons, or lovers, or brothers, might be a trifle less useless, vapid, and wearied."

“Quenched in the world’s cold water!” cried Alma, who had been pondering on De Vigne’s speech, and had never heard poor Curly’s. “It never shall be, Sir Folko. The fire of true enthusiasm is like the fires of Baku, which no water can ever attempt to quench, and which burn steadily on from night to day, and year to year, because their well-spring is eternal.”

“Or because the gasses are poisonous, and nobody cares to approach them?” asked De Vigne, mischievously.

I noticed that Alma was the first who had brought back in any degree the love of merriment and repartee natural to him in his youth; the first with whom, since his fatal marriage-day, he had ever cordially *laughed*. She called him Sir Folko, because she persisted in the resemblance between him and her favorite knight which she had discovered in her childhood, and because, as she told him, “Major De Vigne” was so ceremonious. His manner with her, like that of an elder brother to a pretty spoilt child, had established a curiously familiar friendship between them, strangely different from the usual intercourse of men and young girls; for De Vigne received from her the compliments and frankly-expressed admiration that come ordinarily from the man to the woman. Somehow or other it seemed perfectly natural between *them*, and, après tout, Eve’s

My author and disposer!—what thou wilt
Unargued I obey. God is thy law,
Thou mine——

is strangely touching, sweet, and natural—strangely like, surely, the love that nature *meant* women to bear to men, and strangely *unlike* the “penchant” of the present day, when we kneel at the lady’s feet to sue for that condescending assurance of an “interest,” unacknowledged and unseen till our “intentions” are fully known, and even then meas-

ured out but gingerly and meagerly, as is maidenly and proper!

Alma shook her head (on which the much-praised "golden hair" of Tom Severn waved and clustered in shining undulating bandeaux) impatiently at De Vigne:

"Who can beat you at repartee? If the gas is poisoned, monsieur, you have some of it. You have a good deal of enthusiasm, only it has had a marble stone rolled over it, somehow or other, and will not acknowledge it is still alive and awake under it."

"The deuce!—how quick-sighted this little thing is!" thought De Vigne, as he answered:

"I enthusiastic! Good Heavens! what an idea! I have done with all that long ago, thank God. I am the most practical and commonplace man——"

"You commonplace!" cried Alma, with horror unspeakable, and bursting indignation. "Well, if you are commonplace, so am I, and that is a thing I never *did* think!"

"No, but perhaps you have rather more vanity than I?" said De Vigne, looking at her with an amused smile. Alma, for once, had no answer, she was so occupied in laughing at her own defeat.

Curly was enchanted with her; he went into tenfold more raptures about her than the beauties of the Drawing-room, with their perfect tournures and sweeping trains, had ever extorted from him; she was "just his style;" a thing, however, that Curly was perpetually avowing of every different style of blonde and brunette, tall or small, statuesque or kittenish, as they chanced to chase one another in and out of his capacious heart.

"She is a little darling!" he swore, earnestly, as we drove homeward, "and certainly the very prettiest woman I have ever seen."

"Rather overdone that, Curly," said De Vigne, dryly,

“considering all the regular beauties you have fallen down before and worshiped, and that poor little Alma is no regular beauty at all.”

“No, she’s much better,” said Curly, decidedly. “Where’s your regular beauty that’s worth that little dear’s grace, and vivacity, and lovely coloring?”

De Vigne put up his eyebrows as if he would not give much for the praise of such a universal admirer as Curly was of all degrees and orders of the beau sexe.

II.

LE CHAT QUI DORMAIT.

“Who is that Little Tressillian they were talking of at De Vigne’s the other night?” Sabretasche asked me one morning, in the window at White’s—his club, par excellence, where he was referee and criterion on all things of art, fashion, and society, and where his word could crush a belle, sell a picture, and condemn a coterie

He shrugged his shoulders as I told him, and stroked his moustaches:

“Very little good will come of *that*; at least for her; for him there will be an amusement for a time, then a certain regret—remorse, perhaps, as he is very generous-hearted—and then a separation, and—oblivion.”

“Do you think so? I fancy De Vigne paid too heavy a price for passion to have any fancy to let its reins loose again.”

“Mon cher, mon cher!” cried Sabretasche, impatiently, “if Phaeton had not been killed by that thunderbolt, do you suppose that the bouleversement and the conflagration

would have deterred him from driving his father's chariot as often as Sol would have let him had it?"

"Possibly not; but I mean that De Vigne is thoroughly steeled against all female humanity. The sex of the Tressus cannot possibly, he thinks, have any good in it; and I believe he only takes what notice he does of Alma Tressillian from friendship for her old grandfather, and pity for her desolate position."

"Friendship—pity? For Heaven's sake, Arthur, do not you, a man of the world, talk such nonsense. To what, pray, do friendship and pity invariably bring men and women? De Vigne and his protégée are walking upon mines."

"Which will explode beneath them?"

"Sans doute. We are, unhappily, mortal, mon ami! I will go down and see this Alma Tressillian some day when I have nothing to do. Let me see; she is painting that little picture for me, of course, that I ordered of him from his unknown artist. He must take me down; I shall soon see how the land lies between them."

Accordingly, Sabretasche one day, when De Vigne and he were driving down to a dinner at the Castle, took out his watch, and found they would be there twenty minutes too early, from De Vigne's clocks having been too fast.

"We shall be there half an hour too soon, my dear fellow. Turn aside, and take me to see this little friend of yours with the pretty name and the pretty pictures. If you refuse, I shall think Vane Castleton is right, and that you are like the famed dog in the manger. I have a right to see the artist that is executing my own order."

De Vigne nodded, and turned the horses' heads toward St. Crucis, not with an over good grace, though, for he knew Sabretasche's reputation was that he was as cruel as he was winning to the fair sex; and the Colonel, with his

fascination and his *bonnes fortunes*, was not exactly the man that, whether dog in the manger or not, De Vigne thought a very safe friend for his "Little Tressillian." But he did not care enough about it to make an excuse, if he had had one, and there was no possibility of resisting Sabretasche when he had set his mind upon anything. Very quietly, very gently, but very securely, he kept his hold upon it till he had it yielded up to him. I believe it was that quality, more than even his beauty and his attractions, which gave him his *Juanesque* reputation and success.

So De Vigne had to introduce the Colonel to little Alma, who received them with her usual ease and grace, so singularly free alike from *gêne* or boldness, awkwardness or freedom. Sabretasche dropped into an easy-chair beside her, with his eye-glass up, and began to talk to her. He was a great adept in the art of "bringing out." He had a way of hovering over a woman, and fixing his beautiful eyes on her, and talking softly and pleasantly, so that the subject under his skillful mesmerism developed talent that might otherwise never have gleamed out; and with Alma, who could talk with any and everybody on all subjects under the sun, from metaphysics and ethics to her kitten's collar, and who would discuss philosophies with you as readily as she would chatter nonsense to her parrot, it is needless to say Sabretasche had little difficulty.

De Vigne, Sabretasche's only rival at club and mess-rooms in wit, and *repartee*, and varied, original conversation, let the Colonel have all the talk to himself, half irritated—he scarcely knew why—at the sight of his immovable and inquiring eye-glass, and the sound of his low, *trainante*, musical voice. Now and then, amidst his conversation, the Colonel shot a glance at him, and went on with his criticisms on art, sacred, legendary, and historic;

on painting in the medieval and the modern styles, with such a deep knowledge and refined appreciation of his subject as few presidents of the R. A. have ever shown in their lectures.

At last De Vigne rose, impatient past endurance, though he could hardly have told you why.

"It is half-past six, Sabretasche; the turbot and turtle will be cold."

The Colonel smiled:

"Thank you, my dear fellow; there are a few things in life more attractive than turtle or turbot. The men will wait; they would be the last to hurry us if they knew our provocation to delay."

De Vigne could have found it in his heart to have kicked the Colonel for that speech, and the soft sweet glance accompanying it. "He will spoil that little thing," he thought, angrily. "No woman's head is strong enough to stand his and Curly's flattery."

"I like your little lady, De Vigne," said Sabretasche, as they drove away. "She is really very charming, good style, and strikingly clever."

"She is not *mine*," said De Vigne, with a haughty stare of surprise.

"Well! she will be, I dare say."

"Indeed no. I did not suppose your notions of my honor, or rather dishonor, were like Vane Castleton's."

"Nor are they, cher ami," said the Colonel, with that grave gentleness which occasionally replaced his worldly wit and gay ordinary tone. "But like him I know the world; and I know, as you would, too, if you thought a moment, that a man of your age cannot have that sort of friendly intercourse with a girl of hers without its surely ripening into something infinitely warmer and more dangerous. You would be the first to sneer at an attempt at

platonics in another; you are the last man in the world to dream of such follies yourself. Tied as you are by the cruelty and absurdity of Church and Law, you cannot frequent the society of a girl as fascinating as your little friend yonder without danger for her; and for you, with your generous nature, probably regret and remorse, or, at the least, satiety and regret. With nine men out of ten the result would be love and a liaison lightly formed and as lightly broken; but you have an uncommon nature, and a young girl like Little Tressillian your own warmth of heart would never let you desert and leave unprotected. I hate advising; I never do it to anybody. My life has left me little title to counsel men against sins and follies which I daily commit myself, nor do I count as sins many things the world condemns as such. Only here I see so plainly what will come of it, that I do not like you to rush into it blindfold and repent of it afterward. Because you have had fifty such loves which cost you nothing, that is no reason that the fifty-first may not cost you some pain, some very great pain, in its formation or its severance——”

“You mean very kindly, Sabretasche, but there is no question of ‘love’ here,” interrupted De Vigne, with his impatient hauteur. “In the first place, you, so well read in woman’s character, might know she is far too frank and familiar with me for any fear of the kind in another. I have paid too much for passion ever to risk it again. I am not a boy to fall into a thing whether I like it or not, and I hope I know too well what is due from honor and generosity to win the love of a young and unprotected girl like Alma while I am by my own folly fettered and cursed by marriage ties. Sins enough I have upon my soul, God knows, but there is no danger of my erring here. I have no temptation; but if I had I should resist it; to take advantage of her innocence and ignorance of my history

would be a blackguard's act, to which no madness, even if I felt it, would ever make me condescend to stoop!"

De Vigne spoke with all the sternness and impatience natural to him when roused, spoke in overstrong terms, as men do of a fault they are sure they shall never commit themselves. Sabretasche listened, an unusual angry shadow gathering in his large soft eyes, and a bitter sneer on his pale delicate features, as he leaned back and folded his arms to silence and dolce.

"Most immaculate pharisee! Remember a divine injunction, 'Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall.'"

De Vigne cut his horses impatiently with the whip.

"I am no pharisee, but I am, with all my faults and vices, a man of honor still."

Sabretasche answered nothing, but annoyance was still in his eyes, and a sneer still on his lips. In a few minutes they had reached the Castle, and over their Rhenish and entremets De Vigne and Sabretasche laughed and talked as though they had quite forgotten their approach to a quarrel. They were too wise men, and too attached to one another, to split upon straws. Sabretasche was really a very sweet temper. He was wont to say anger was such a trouble and exertion that no man who knew how to enjoy life would allow himself to feel it. De Vigne was a hot and fiery temper, but if he was wrong he would own it with frank grace; and if he had been in a fury and passion with you, he never by any chance bore you malice, and, as his poor mother used to say, the sun shone all the sweeter for the momentary tempest.

De Vigne had one fault, which I must have described his character very badly to you if you have not already seen, namely, that if advised not to do a thing, that thing would he go and do straightway; moreover, being a man of strong will and resolve, very fastidious in his own honor

and very reliant on his own strength, he was too apt, as in his fatal marriage, to go headlong, perfectly safe in his own power to guide himself, to judge for himself, and to draw back when it was needful. Therefore, he paid no attention whatever to Sabretasche's counsels, but, as it chanced, went down to see Alma rather more often than he had done before; for she, when talking once of her pictures, had said how much she wished she could exhibit at the Water-Color Society, which De Vigne, knowing something of the president, and of the society in general, had been able to manage for her, greatly to her own delight, for Alma had all the natural ambition of true talent to make itself known and admired. De Vigne, too, was pleased to be the means of giving her pleasure, for he was by nature formed to do kindnesses where he liked people, and to enjoy seeing his kindness bring fruit of joy for others; and little Alma was now the only one to whom he softened, and hers the only gratitude expressed to him in which he believed.

"What should I do without you?" said Alma, fervently, to him one day, when he went there to tell her her picture was accepted. "Oh! you are so kind to me, Sir Folko!"

"I? Not at all, petite," laughed he. "I have nothing benevolent in my composition, I assure you."

"Benevolent! No," laughed Alma, indignantly, "that is a horrid word; that means a man who is as kind to his next-door neighbor as to the person he loves best in the world. Benevolent means a Jenkinson with white hair and unctuous words—a man who goes about for other people's destitute orphans or ragged children, and quite forgets to be sweet-tempered to his wife or generous to his own sons. Benevolent is as bad for a man's character as a shabby hat for his appearance. No, Sir Folko, you are much better than benevolent; you are generous, and

true, and noble-hearted, and do real kindnesses unseen, not ostentatious ones that men may praise you."

"That is no merit; I dislike praise, and hate to be thanked. But, my dear child, I wish you would not exalt me to such a pinnacle. What will you say when I tumble down one day, and you see nothing of me but worthless shivers?"

"Reverence you still," said Alma, softly. "A fragment of the Parthenon is worth a whole spotless and unbroken modern building. If my ideal were to fall, I should treasure the dust. The dead prince's heart was valued more than a thousand living ordinary ones of commonplace and useless Lowlanders."

"By the Douglas, perhaps; scarcely by the poor Lowlanders themselves," said De Vigne, half smiling. "But, seriously, I wish you would not get into the habit of rating me so high, Alma. I don't in the least come up to it. You do not guess—how should you?—you cannot even in fancy, picture the life that I, and men like me, lead; you cannot imagine the wild follies with which we drown our past, the reckless pleasures with which we pass our present, our temptations, our weaknesses, our errors; how should you, child as you are, living out of the world in a solitude peopled only with the bright fancies of your own pure imagination, that never incarnates the hideous fauns and beckoning bacchanals which haunt and fever ours?"

"But I can," said Alma, earnestly, looking up to him with her dark-blue eyes, in which even he, skeptic as he was in women, could see no guile and no concealment. "I do not go into the world, it is true, but still I know the world to a certain extent; it is not possible to read, as I have done, the broader and freer range of thinkers, which you tell me are *défendus* to girls of my age without learning more of the thoughts, temptations, and impulses

of men than a young lady can learn by a few waltzes in a ball-room, or the vapid talk of ordinary society. Montaigne, Rochefoucauld, Rabelais, Goethe, Emerson, Bolingbroke, the translated classics, do you not think they teach me the world, or, at least, of what makes the world, Human Nature, better than the few hours at a dinner-table, or the gossip of morning calls, which you tell me is all girls like me, in good society, are allowed to see of life? You know, Sir Folko, it always seems to me that women, fenced in as they are in educated circles by boundaries which they cannot overstep, except to their own hinderance, screened from all temptations, deprived of all opportunity to wander, if they wished, out of the beaten track, should be all the gentler to your sex, whose whole life is one long temptation, and to whose lips is almost forced that Circean 'cup of life' whose flowers round its brim hide the poisons at its dregs. Women have, if they acknowledge them, passions, ambitions, impatience at their own monotonous rôle, longings for the living life denied to them; but everything tends to crush these down in them, has thus tended through so many generations, that now it has come to be an accepted thing that they must be calm, fair, pulseless, passionless statues, and when here and there a woman dares to acknowledge that her heart beats, and that nature is not wholly dead within her, the world stares at her, and rails at her, for there is no *bête noire* so terrible to the world as Truth! No, Sir Folko, though I am a girl—a child, as you say, in knowledge and experience, compared with you—I can fancy your temptations, I can picture your errors and your follies, I can understand how you drink your absinthe one hour because you liked its flavor, and drink more the next hour to make you forget your weakness in having yielded to it at all. That my own solitude and imagination are only peopled with shapes bright and fair, I must thank Heaven

and not myself. If I had been born in squalor and nursed in vice, what would circumstance and surroundings have made me? Oh, I think, instead of the pharisee's presumptuous 'I thank God that I am holier than he,' we, with human nature strong within us, and error ready at any moment to burst out, and passion beating so warmly in us as it does in the hearts of even the coldest and most prudent, our thanksgiving should be, 'I thank God that I have so little opportunity to do evil!' and we should forgive, as we wish to be forgiven ourselves, those whose temptations, either from their own nature, or from the outer world, have been so much greater than our own."

Her voice was wonderfully musical, with a strange *timbre* of pathos in it; her gesticulation had all the grace and fervor of her Southern Europe origin; her eyes and lips—indeed, her whole face—were singularly expressive of the thoughts that lay in her fertile and fervid mind, and spoke themselves in natural and untutored eloquence. Her words sent a strange thrill to De Vigne's heart; they were the first gentle, the first sympathizing, and the first tolerant words he had heard from a woman's lips since his mother had died. He had known but two classes of women: those who shared his errors and pandered to his pleasures, whose life disgusted, while their beauty lured him; and those who, piquing themselves on a superiority of virtue, perhaps not seldom unjustly denounced the shortcomings of others, giving the coup de Jarnac to those already gone down under society's kicks and cuffs, whose illiberality equally disgusted him in another way, and whose sermons only roused him to more wayward rebellion against the social laws which they expounded. It touched him singularly to hear words at once so true, so liberal, and so humble, from one on whose young life he knew that no stain had rested; to meet with so much comprehension and so much

sympathy from a heart, compared with his own, as pure and spotless from all error as the snow-white roses in her windows, on which the morning dewdrops rested without soil. Wide as was the difference between them, in the liberality of thought there was unison of mind; in the passion and warmth of heart, now checked in the man, still sleeping in the girl, there was similarity of character, and at her words something of De Vigne's old nature began to wake into new existence, as, after a long and weary sleep, the eyelids tremble before the soul arouses to the heat and action of the day.

As he looked down in those dangerous eyes of hers, a memory of the woman whom Church and Law in their cruel folly called his wife passed over him—he could scarcely tell why or how—with a cold chill, like the air of a pestilent charnel-house.

“Alma, if women were like you, men might be better than they are. Child, I wish you would not talk as you do. You wake up thoughts and memories that had far better sleep.”

She touched his hand gently with her own little fingers:

“Sir Folko, what are those memories?”

He drew his hand away and laughed, not joyously, but that laugh which has less joy in it even than tears:

“Don't you know a proverb, Alma—‘N'éveillez pas le chat qui dort?’”

“But were the cat a tiger I would not fear it, if it were yours.”

“But *I* fear it.”

There was more meaning in that than little Alma guessed. The impetuous passion that had blasted his life and linked his name with the Trefusis would be, while his life lasted, a giant whose throes and mighty will would always hold him captive in his chains.

He was silent; he sat looking out of the window by which he sat, and playing with a branch of the white rose that stood in a stand among the other flowers he had sent her. His lips were pressed together, his eyebrows slightly contracted, his dark eagle eyes sad and troubled, as if he were looking far away—so he was—to a white headstone lying among fragrant violet tufts under the old elms at Vigné, with the spring sunshine in its fitful lights and shadows playing fondly round the name of the only woman who had loved him at once fondly and unselfishly.

Alma looked at him long and wistfully, some of his darker shadows flung on her own bright and sunny nature—as the yew-tree throws the dark beauty of its boughs over the golden cowslips that nestle at its roots.

At last she bent forward, lifting her soft frank eyes to his.

“Sir Folko, where are your thoughts? Tell me; you may trust me.”

Her voice won its way to his heart; he knew that interest, not curiosity, spoke in it, and he answered gently,

“With my mother.”

It was the first time he had spoken of her to Alma—he never breathed her name to any one. Alma looked up at him, her face full of tenderness and pity.

“You loved her dearly?”

“Very dearly.”

Alma’s eyes filled with tears, a passion very rare with her

“Tell me of her,” she said, softly.

“No! I cannot talk of her.”

“Because you loved her so much?”

“No! Because I killed her.”

That was the great sorrow of his life; that his folly had cost him his name, and, as he considered, his honor, was less bitter to him than that it had cost his mother’s life.

Alma, at his reply—uttered almost involuntarily under his breath—gazed at him, horror-stricken, with wild terror in her large eyes; yet De Vigne might have noticed that she did not shrink from him, but rather drew the closer to him. Her expression recalled his thoughts.

“Not that, not that,” he said, hastily: “My hand never harmed her, but my passions did. My own headlong and willful folly sent her to her grave. Child! you may well thank God if Temptation never enter your life. No man has strength against it.”

Alma’s face still spoke all the full yet silent sympathy that best chimed in with his haughty and fiery spirit, which craved and demanded the warmest, yet at the same time most delicate, comprehension. It was the sort of sympathy which lures on men to confessions which they would never make to another man—a sympathy which assures them that whatever sins they recount there will be pity and excuse made fondly for them.

For the first time De Vigne felt an inclination to disclose his marriage to Alma Tressillian; to tell her what he would have told to no other living being: of all his own madness had cost him, of the fatal revenge the Trefusis had taken, of the headlong impetuosity which had led him to raise the daughter of a beggar-woman to one of the proudest names in England, of the fatal curse which he had drawn on his own head, and the iron fetters which his own hand had forged. The words were already on his lips. I cannot tell what there was in the Little Tressillian to win upon him so, but certain it is that in another minute he would have bent his pride and laid bare his secret to her, if at that moment the door had not opened—to admit Alma’s quasi-governess, Miss Russell.

Alma was very right—our life hinges upon Opportunity!

De Vigne never again felt a wish to tell her of his marriage.

He rose, Alma rose too, sorry, for the first time in her life, to see her friend; and Miss Russell, a little, quietly-dressed, timid woman, the perfection of a *vieille fille*, (whose life, Alma has confessed to me, she made somewhat of a burden to her, with her heterodox opinions and wild spirits, and who must have been often horrified, poor lady! by her pupil's daring independence and imaginative flights,) looked with mild astonishment at Alma kneeling down before De Vigne, and at De Vigne's stately figure and statuesque head, which were not without a certain effect upon her—as on what daughter of Eve, however far gone in years or prudery, would they not have been?

De Vigne went up to her, with his “grand air” and his courtly manner, always most courtly where the recipients of it were in an inferior position to himself, and claimed his recollection. He had seen her once, before Boughton Tressillian's departure for Lorave—a fact entirely forgotten by him, but of which Alma had assured him. Miss Russell remembered him by dint of having had his name dinned into her ears all the years she had been with Alma, but looked upon him with some little disquietude nevertheless; for it is noticeable that *vieilles filles* who have escaped from our griffes rather more completely than they could have wished, invariably regard us as most dangerous beasts of prey.

De Vigne stayed with her some twenty minutes, chatting chiefly of old Tressillian; then he left, for he did not much care for his visit to Alma if it was not a *tête-à-tête*, and the roll of the tilbury grew fainter and fainter as he drove down the road, remembering, for the first time, what he had come to tell the girl, that her picture was accepted by the Society.

As soon as he was gone, Miss Russell took it upon herself to expostulate with her quondam pupil as to the non-advisability of such tête-à-tête calls. She had known nothing of them before, living in a family at Windsor, which she was seldom able to leave for a visit to her old pet and favorite.

"Now do be quiet, you dear old thing!" cried Alma, at the first of Miss Russell's prudent periods. "You know your dreadfully stiff ideas were the only rock on which you and I ever quarreled. I never subscribed to them, and never shall. I have told you how I met Major de Vigne. He is the best friend on earth I have. He is never weary of doing me kindnesses. There is no generosity which he would stop at if I would accept it. He finds purchasers for my pictures, and praises them, and gets them put in exhibitions—he who has Guidos, and Poussins, and Landseers on his walls! He is noble-hearted, honorable, generous as the sunlight; and the royalty of his intellect is only equaled by the royalty of his heart! And then you tell me it is 'improper' to receive him, 'unwise' to like him. You might as well tell the flowers not to like the clouds, whose morning shade and evening dews make all their life and beauty!"

Miss Russell sighed. Well she might, poor luckless lady! for Alma's vehement rush of words, and her impassioned Italian gesticulation, to say nothing of her opinions, were calculated to overwhelm and crush a whole legion of such timid and gentle mortals as her poor governess.

"But, my dear child," she ventured mildly, "it is not the custom for young ladies, situated as you are, to receive the visits of young unmarried men—you must allow that?"

"I allow it," laughed Alma; "but, to begin with, there are few young ladies situated as I am, all alone in a horrible farm-house with nothing in the world to talk to but a

goldfinch and a dog, (till he came and gave me my darling Pauline, look at her beautiful green and yellow and scarlet feathers!) Heaven forefend there should be, poor things! for it is by no means a delightful existence, without society, fun, or pleasant sauce of any kind! In the second, as I have often assured you, only you never would believe me, the ways of the world are not always right ways, and very seldom agreeable ones; and a little nature, and gratitude, and warm feeling are worth all their conventionalities and prudence. In the third, *his* visits might honor a queen, and they are the single joy of my life. Even the brute Caliban knew how to feel grateful, and shall I be lower and less quick in feeling than Major de Vigne's dogs and horses, who love him for his care, his kindness, and his gentleness?"

Miss Russell was puzzled, as your worldly-wise people sometimes are by those who are only nature-wise.

"Be as grateful as you please, my love; Heaven forbid I should seem to teach you ingratitude or mistrust; but don't you know, my dear child, that women, especially young and inexperienced ones, Alma, cannot be too circumspect in their conduct? They are so easily misconstrued, and, unhappily, my dear child, men are so apt to take advantage of——"

Alma's face glowed crimson in an instant, and her eyes flashed fiercely with that Southern passion which lay underneath her laughing, careless gayety of nature.

"I understand you," she said, haughtily, "but I am not afraid of being 'misconstrued,' or 'taken advantage of,' as you suggest. Men of the world are truer judges of character than our censorious and purblind sex, and a gentleman of honor is as safe a friend as the world holds."

"I hope so," sighed Miss Russell, quite bewildered; "but I have certainly heard something against Major De

Vigne. I cannot remember what, but I think—I fancy—he has been very wild——”

“Possibly,” said Alma, her little soft lips curling contemptuously. “Whatever you may have heard I shall request you to keep it to yourself. I will hear nothing, even from you, detrimental to Major De Vigne.”

Miss Russell was shut up! the stronger character of the young one cowed the weaker disposition of the elder and more timid woman. Alma changed the subject, and busied herself, in her rapid and graceful way, in making her governess welcome, in showing her her pictures, in introducing Sylvo and Pauline to her notice, in a hundred pretty little *petits soins*, which sat very charmingly on her, though she was about the least “domestic” young lady I ever came across; but there was a lack of that entire confidence in Miss Russell, and joyous pleasure in her society, which her pet pupil had always before demonstrated. Poor cause: Miss Russell had spoken against the god of her idolatry—De Vigne.

There are gods still, as in the days of Ancient Priestcraft, on whose altars are offered up with tears of blood no holocaust less costly than a human heart—quivering with mortal life, throbbing with vital pain!

PART THE TWELFTH.

I.

PAOLO AND FRANCESCA.

MAY came; it was the height of the season; town was full; her Majesty had given her first levee; Belgravia and Mayfair were occupied; the Ride and the Ring were full, too, at six o'clock every day, and the thousand toys with which Babylon amuses her grown babies were ready, among others the Exhibition of Fine Arts, where, on its first day, De Vigne and I went to lounge away an hour, chiefly for the great entertainment and fun afforded to persons of sane mind by the eccentricities of the pre-Raphaelite gentlemen.

In the entrance we met Lady Molyneux and her daughter, Sabretasche and his young Grace of Regalia with them. It was easy to see which the Viscountess favored the most. Regalia would have made her a charming son-in-law, being weak, good-natured, and rich à ravir; but as he was small, sandy-haired, limited his criticisms to "Oh!" "Ah!" "I see!" "Really!" "Dooood fine!" etc., it was perhaps natural that Violet was more blinded to his irreproachable character and advantageous position than she ought to have been, and gave all her attention to the Colonel, with his silvery tongue and beautiful face, and explanations of art at once masterly and poetic, the explanations of a refined scholar and a profound critic.

"Are you come to be désenchanté with all living womanhood by the contemplation of Messrs. Millais and Hunt's ideals, Major De Vigne?" asked Violet, giving him her

hand, looking a very lovely sample of "living womanhood," in her dainty toilette and her perfect-fitting gloves, and her little cobweb black lace veil, than through which a pretty woman never looks prettier. Ladies said she was very extravagant in dress. She might be; she was naturally lavish; and worshiped instinctively all that was graceful in form or coloring; but I only know she dressed perfectly, and, what was better still, never *thought about it*.

"Perhaps we should suffer less disappointment if ladies *were* like Millais's ideals," smiled De Vigne. "From those rough, red-haired, long-limbed women we should never look for much perfection; whereas the faces and forms of our living beauties are rather like belladonna, beautiful to look at, but destruction to approach or trust!"

"You are incorrigible!" cried Violet, with a tiny shrug of her shoulders, "and forget that if belladonna is a poison to those who don't know how to use it, it is a medicine and a balm to those who do."

"But for one cautious enough to cure himself, how many unwary are poisoned for life!" laughed De Vigne.

He said it as a jest, to tease her, but a bitter memory prompted it.

"Send that fellah to Coventry, Miss Molyneux, do," lisped Regalia; "he's so dweadfully rude."

"Not yet; sarcasms are infinitely more refreshing than empty compliments," said Violet, with a scornful flash of her brilliant eyes. "The little Duke was idiot enough to attempt to flatter Violet Molyneux, to whom the *pas* in beauty and talent was indisputably given. "Colonel Sabretasche, take my catalogue, I have not looked into it yet, and mark all our favorites for me. I am going to enjoy the pictures now, and talk to nobody."

A charming ruse on the young lady's part to keep Sabretasche at her side and make him talk to her, for they

passed over eleven pictures, and lingered over a twelfth, while he discoursed on the Italian and the French, the German and the English schools, with rapid sketches of past styles, and graphic anecdotes of Vernet and Leslie, in a manner that soon enabled them to lose Lady Molyneux, talking pieces out of Ruskin, with her glass up, to poor young Regalia, only suppressing his yawns and keeping his post from pure courtesy, though my lady was a very pretty woman, and, in her own opinion at least, as bewitching to a young fellow as her daughter, of whom, *entre nous*, she was not a little jealous.

"Why have you never been to see me for four days?" asked Violet, standing before one of the glorious sea pieces of Stanfield.

Sabretasche hesitated a moment.

"I have had other engagements."

Violet's eyes flashed. "I beg your pardon, Colonel Sabretasche; not being changeable myself, it did not occur to me that you were so. However, if it is a matter of so little moment to you, it is of still less to me."

"Did I not tell you," whispered Sabretasche, "that I like too well to be with you to dare to be with you much? You cannot have forgotten our conversation at Richmond?"

The color rushed into Violet's cheeks under her little filmy veil.

"No," she answered, hurriedly; "but you promised me your friendship, and you have no right to take it away. I do not pretend to understand you, I do not seek to know more than you choose to tell me, but since you once promised to be my friend, you have no right to behave capriciously to me."

"Violet, for God's sake do not break my heart!" broke

in Sabretasche, his voice scarcely above his breath, but full of such intense anguish that Violet was startled. "Your friend I *cannot* be; anything dearer I *may not* be. Forget me and all interest in my fate. Of your interest in me I am utterly unworthy; and I would rather that you should credit all the evil that the world attributes to me, and, crediting it, learn to hate me, than think that I, in my own utter selfishness, had thrown one shade on your young life, mingled one regret with your bright future."

They were both leaning against the rail; no one saw Violet's face as she answered him.

"To speak of hate from me to you is folly, and it is too late to command forgetfulness. If you had no right to make me remember you, you have still less right to bid me forget you."

"Violet, come and look at this picture of Lance's, Regalia talks of buying it," said her mother's cold, slow, languid voice.

Violet turned, and though she smiled and spoke about the picture in question with some of her old vivacity and self-possession, her face had lost its brilliant tinting, and her little white teeth were set together.

De Vigne joined them at that minute.

"Miss Molyneux, I want to show you a painting in the Middle Room. It is just your style, I fancy. Will you come and look at it?"

We all went into the Middle Room after him, Sabretasche too, pausing occasionally to look at some of the luckless exiles near the ceiling with his lorgnon. By-the-way, what a farce it is to hang pictures where one must have a lorgnon to look at them; the exhibition of the few is the suppression of the many!

"Voilà!" said De Vigne. "Am I wrong? Don't you like it?"

“Like it!” echoed Violet. “O Heaven, how beautiful!”

Quite forgetful that she was the center of a crowd who were looking at her much more than at the paintings on the walls, she stood, the color back in her cheeks, her eyes lifted to the picture, her whole face full of reverent love and fervent adoration for the beauty it embodied. The painting deserved it. It was Love—old in story, yet new to every human heart—the love of Francesca and Paolo, often essayed by artists, yet never rendered as the poet would have had it, as it was rendered here.

There were no vulgarities of a fabled Hell; there were the two, alone in that true torture—

Ricordarsi del tempo felice nella miseria—

yet happy because together. Her face and form were in full light, his in shadow. Heart beating against heart, their arms round each other, they looked down into each other's eyes. On his face were the fierce passions, against which he had no strength, mingled with the deep and yearning regret for the fate he had drawn in with his own.

On hers, lifted up to him, was all the love at sight of which he who beheld it “swooned even as unto death,” the love—

——piacer si forte

Che come vedi ancor non m'abbandona—

the love which made hell, paradise, and torture together dearer than heaven alone. Her face spoke, her clinging arms circled him as though defying power in heaven strong enough to part them; her eyes looked into his with unutterable tenderness, anguish for his sorrow, ecstasy in his presence! and on her soft lips, still trembling with the memory of that first kiss which had been their ruin, was

all the heroism and all the passion, all the fidelity, enthusiasm, and joy in him alone, spoken in that one sentence—

Questi che mai da me non fia diviso!

The picture told its tale; crowds gathered round it; and those who could not wholly appreciate its wonderful coloring and skill were awed by its living humanity, its passionate tenderness, its exquisite beauty.

Violet stood, regardless of the men and women around her, looking up at the Francesca, a fervent response to it, a yearning sympathy with the warm human love and passionate joys of which it breathed, written on her mobile features.

She turned away from it with a heavy sigh, and the flush deepened in her cheeks as she met Sabretasche's eyes, who now stood behind her.

"You are pleased with that picture," he said, bending his head.

"Is it not beautiful?" cried Violet, passionately. "It is not to be criticised; it is to be loved. It is art and poetry and human nature blended in one. Whoever painted it interprets art as no other artist here can do. He has loved and felt his subject, and makes others in the force of his genius feel and love it too. Listen how every one is praising it! They all admire it, yet not nine out of ten of these people can understand it. Tell me who painted it, quick! Now you are looking in the last room, and it is 226, Middle Room. Oh! give me the catalogue!"

She took it out of his hands with that rapid vivacity which worried her mother so dreadfully as bad ton, and made her greatest charm to us, turned the leaves over with the greatest impatience till she reached "226. Paolo and Francesca—Vivian Sabretasche.

Amor che a nullo amato amar perdona,
Mi prese del costui piacer sì forte,
Che come vedi ancor non m'abbandona
Amor condusse noi ad una morte."

She dropped the book; she turned to him with such intense delight that it was almost pain; she could not speak, but she held out her hand to him. Sabretasche took it for an instant as they leaned over the rail together in the security and "solitude of a crowd."

"Do not speak of it here," he whispered, as he bent down for the fallen catalogue.

Violet gave him a glance so full of sympathy, delight, and adoration, that she had no need of words.

"'Pon my honor, Sabretasche," whispered little Regalia, "we're all so astonished—turning artist, eh? Never knew you exhibited. Splendid picture—ah—really!"

"You do me much honor," said Sabretasche, coldly—he hated the little puppy who was always dawdling after Violet—"but I should prefer not to be congratulated before a room full of people."

"On my life, old fellow, I envy you," said De Vigne, too low for any one to hear him; "not for being the talk of the room, for that is neither to your taste nor mine, but for having such magnificent talent as you have given us here."

"Cui bono?" said Sabretasche, with his slight smile, that was too gentle for discontent and too sad for cynicism.

"I had not an idea *whose* Francesca I was bringing Miss Molyneux to see," De Vigne continued. "How came you to exhibit this year?"

"Oh, I have been a dabbler in art a long time," laughed the Colonel. "Many of the Forty are my intimate friends; they would not have rejected anything I sent."

"They would have been mad to reject the Francesca;

they have nothing to compete with it on the walls. I wish you were in Poland Street, Sabretasche, that one could order of you. You are the first fine gentleman, since Sir George Beaumont, who has turned 'artiste véritable,' and you grace it better than he."

Sabretasche and his Grace of Regalia, De Vigne, and I, went to luncheon that day with Lady Molyneux in Lowndes Square, at which meal the Colonel made himself so intensely charming, lively, and winning, that the viscountess, strong as were her leanings to her pet duke, could but admit that he shone to very small advantage, and made a mental mem. never to invite the two together again. The Molyneux were devoting that morning to picture-viewing, the viscountess martyred secretly, her daughter genuinely delighted. And from the Royal Academy, after luncheon, they went to the French aquarelles, in Pall Mall, and thence to the Water-Color Exhibition, whither De Vigne and I followed them in his tilbury.

"I wonder what they will say to Alma's picture," said De Vigne, as we alighted. "I wish it may make a hit, as it is her livelihood now, poor child!"

Strange enough, it was before Alma's picture that we found most people in the room congregated; and Violet turned to us:

"Come and look here, Major De Vigne; this 'Louis Dix-sept in the Tower of the Temple,' by Miss Trevelyan—Trevanion—no, Tressillian—whoever she be—is the gem of the collection, to my mind. There is an unlucky green ticket on it, else I would purchase it. What enviable talent! I wish I were Miss Tressillian!"

"How rash you are!" said De Vigne. "How can you tell but what Miss Tressillian may be some masculine woman living in an entresol, painting with a clay pipe between her teeth, and horses and cows for veritable models

in a litter adjoining, dressing like George Sand, and deriving inspiration from gin?"

"What a shameful picture!" cried Violet, indignantly. "I do not know her, nor anything about her, it is true, but I am perfectly certain that the woman who realized and carried out this painting with so much delicacy and grace must have a delicate and graceful mind herself."

"Or," continued De Vigne, ruthlessly, "she may now, for anything you can tell, be a *vieille fille* who has consecrated her life to art, and grown old and ugly in the consecration, and who——"

"Be quiet, Major De Vigne, if you please," interrupted Violet. "I am perfectly certain, I told you, that the artist would correspond to the picture: Raphael was as beautiful as his paintings, Michael Angelo was of noble appearance, Mozart and Mendelssohn had faces full of music, Vernet is a fine military-looking man——"

"Fuseli, too, was," said De Vigne, mischievously, "remarkably like his grand archangels; Reynolds, in his brown coat and wig, is so poetic that one could have no other ideal of the 'Golden Age;' Turner's appearance was so artistic that one would have imagined him a farmer bent on crops; fat and snuffy Handel is the embodiment of the beauty of the *Cangio d'Aspetto*——"

"How tiresome you are!" interrupted Violet again. "I am establishing a theory; I don't care for facts—no theorists ever do in these days. I maintain that a graceful and ennobling art must leave its trace on the thought and mind and manners of its expositors, (I know you are going to remind me of Morland at the hedge-alehouse, of the 'bum-bailiff' and the 'little Jew-broker,' and of Nollkens making the writing-paper label for the single bottle of claret;) never mind, I keep to my theory, and I am sure that this Miss Tressillian, who has had the happiness to paint the

lovely face of that little Dauphin, would, if we could see her, correspond to it; and I envy her without the slightest hesitation."

"You have no need to envy any one," whispered Regalia.

Violet turned impatiently from him, and began to talk to Sabretasche about one of those ever-charming pictures of Mr. Edmund Warren. De Vigne looked at me and smiled, thinking with how much more grounds the little Tressillian had envied Violet Molyneux.

"I wish I could tell you half I feel about your Francesca," said Violet, lifting her eyes to Sabretasche's face, as they stood apart from anybody else in a part of the room little frequented, for there were few people there that morning, and those few were round Alma's pet picture. "You can never guess how I reverence that sublime genius of yours, how fully it speaks to my heart, how completely it reveals to me all your inner nature, which the world, much as it admires you, never sees or dreams of seeing."

Sabretasche bent his head; her words went too near home to him to let him answer them.

"All your pictures," Violet went on, "have seemed to me to bear the stamp of the most superb talent, but this—O Heaven, how beautiful it is! I might have known no other hand but yours could have called it into life. But I did not see it when we came to your studio. Have you long finished it?"

"I finished the painting two years ago; but three *months* ago I saw for the first time the face that answered my ideal, the face that expressed all that I would have expressed in Francesca. I effaced what I had painted, and in its stead I placed—yours."

Violet's eyes dropped; the delicate color in her cheeks wavered and deepened. She had been dimly conscious of a resemblance in the painting, and De Vigne's glance from

Francesca to herself had told her that he at the least saw it also; and, indeed, with the exception that Francesca's hair was golden where Violet's was chestnut, (possibly that gossiping Belgravia might not notice too strong a likeness,) the face of the painting, with its delicate and impassioned features, and the form, with its slight build and yet voluptuous graces, were singularly like her own.

Sabretasche looked closer at her; it was one of those dangerous moments when for any madness men can scarcely be held responsible.

"You could love like Francesca," he said, involuntarily.

It was not above his breath, but his face gave it all the eloquence it lacked, as hers all the response it needed.

She heard his short quick breathing as he stood beside her; she felt the passionate answer that rose to his lips; she knew that if ever a man's love was hers his was then. But he was silent, and when he spoke his voice was full of that utter anguish which had startled her twice before.

"*Keep it, then, and give it to some man more worthy it than I!*"

"Violet, my love, are you not tired of all this?" said Lady Molyneux, sweeping up. "It is half-past four, and I want to go to Swan and Edgar's. Pictures make one's head ache so; I was never so ill in my life as I was after the Sistine chapel."

Sabretasche took her to their carriage without another word between them; and I grieve to record it, it was most improper, unladylike, and utterly against the rules, but Violet pressed his hand between her little French-gloved fingers, as if he had just made her an offer rather than a refusal of love, and looked up in his eyes much as his Francesca's looked in Paolo's. But then Sabretasche was pale as death; *she* could see bitter suffering where others

only saw his usual urbane and courtly smile; and Violet Molyneux, happily for him, was not a conventional young lady, but only a fond, frank, tender, impressionable woman.

The next day, to our surprise, the Colonel asked for leave, got it, and went away.

"What the deuce is that for, Colonel?" said I. "Never been out of town in the season before, have you?"

"Just the reason why I should be now, my dear fellow," responded Sabretasche, lazily. "Twenty years of the same thing is enough to tire one of it, if the thing were paradise itself; and when it comes to be only dusty pavés, whitebait dinners, and club gossip, ennui is very pardonable. The medical men tell me, if I don't give up pleasure for a little time, pleasure will give up me. You know, though I am strong enough in muscle, I am not over-strong physically; so I shall go over to the Continent, and look at it in spring, before there are the pests of English touring about, with Murrays, carpet-bags, and sandwiches."

He vouchsafed no more on the subject, but went. His departure was talked of in clubs and boudoirs; women missed him as they would have missed no other man in London, for Sabretasche was universal censor, referee, regulator of fashion, his bow was the best thing in the Park, his fêtes at Richmond the most charming and exclusive of the season; but people absent on tours are soon forgotten, like dead leaves sucked under a water-wheel and whirled away; and after the first day, perhaps, nobody save De Vigne and I remarked how triste his house in Park Lane looked with the green persiennes closed over its sunny bay-windows.

II.

PALAMON AND ARCITE.

A FEW days after his departure I cantered down the Ride with Violet Molyneux.

"This will be a brilliant season, I think," said I, "and an unusually long one. They were talking of parliament not closing till July, as there is so much business to be done. If such a thing ever happened as to detain the two Houses over the 12th, I am sure my father would have a fit of apoplexy, and all St. Stephen's with him."

"Yes," answered Violet, smiling, "the Lords and Commons may be very attached to the People, but they are still fonder of their Purdey; winding red-tape is nothing to spinning a twenty-pound salmon. Well! they are much more harmlessly employed in the heather than in the cabinet; they had better have a drive of deer than an embroglio of nations."

"Philanthropically I agree with you; personally I can't, for few things would give me such individual pleasure as being ordered off to the Crimea. I envy all those fellows who are gone or going; but we have lost our chef without the war. You know, of course, that Sabretasche has taken himself off just as the season opens?"

"He is gone to the south of France, is he not?"

How calm her voice, how impassive her eyes! Oh, society, society, how you teach us to let the wolf gnaw our vitals without say or sign!

"I can't imagine what took him there, can you?"

Self-possessed she was, but her cheeks flushed. They were very pale when I met her.

"For his health, I understood. Will he—do you know" (she hesitated)—"is he likely to be away long?"

"Some little time, I fancy. I am sorry he is gone; there is no man, except De Vigne, I like better, and he will be very much missed; he is so fêted and admired and sought. Just when all town is talking of that miraculous work of art, that Francesca of his, he chooses to leave. He is an enigmatical fellow."

Her face was very pale again now, and her eyes were not impassive, do what she would. She struck her chest-nut sharply, and got some paces before me.

"We go so slowly, let us gallop back to papa."

"Did Vy Molyneux refuse Sabretasche," said Monckton, as she rode out by Apsley House with her father and mother, "that he went off like a shot, I wonder?"

Curly, who heard him, shouted with laughter. "Sabretasche refused! By Jove, what an idea! No, that's a grief (or a blessing) he'll never come to. All of 'em go down before him, married, widowed, and single. Refused! By George, I wish he heard you! No, it's more probable that he has made Violet desperate after him, (and that she is it's pretty easy to see,) and is gone off for fear Jockey Jack should ask him his intentions; for Sabretasche, I am very sure, would think no woman worth the trouble of marrying, and quite right, too!"

Whatever his motive, the Colonel was gone to that golden land the south of France, where the foamy Rhône speeds on her course, and Marseilles lies by the free blue sea, and the Pic du Midi rears its stately head over the purple vineyards of France and the green sierras of Spain. The Colonel was gone, and all the clubs, and drawing-rooms, and journals were speaking of his Francesca; speaking, for once, unanimously in admiration for the perfect and wonderful union of art and truth. The Francesca was the theme of the day in artistic circles, its masterly conception and unexceptionable handling would from any

pencil have gained it fame; in fashionable circles it only needed the well-known name of Vivian Sabretasche to give it at once an interest and a brevet of value. The Francesca was talked of by everybody, and not talked of much less was the fact that the first day of its exhibition Sabretasche had presented it to Viscount Molyneux, perhaps the man in all town least calculated to appreciate either the art or the gift. Strangely enough, the picture most appreciated in another line by the papers and the virtuosi, was the Little Tressillian's water-color, which, with its subject, its treatment, and the exceedingly beautiful and truthful rendering of the boy's face, attracted more attention than any woman's picture had done for a long time; the art reviews were almost unanimous in its praise; certain faults were pointed out—reviewers must always find *some* as a sort of brevet of their own discernment—but for all that, Alma's first picture was a very decided success, and would have been thought a still more wonderful one if they had known that the artist was a girl of eighteen, whose sole instruction had been a few lessons in the studio of an Italian artist.

Not long after the exhibition, De Vigne, one morning after early parade, after breakfasting, having a quiet smoke, and reading the papers, rang the bell, ordered his horse round, put some of the journals in his coat-pocket, and rode toward Richmond, with the double purpose of having a cool morning gallop before the—as he ungratefully termed it—bother of the day commenced, and of seeing Alma, which he had not done since the success of her picture. He was not long doing the seven miles to the little farm. He always rode fast; I believe it would have been as great a misery to him to be obliged to do a thing slowly as it would have been to Sabretasche to do it quickly! He enjoyed the fresh May morning, the sweet

scent of the budding trees, the free, pure air of early spring which gave him something of the elasticity of his earlier years. His nature was naturally a very happy one; his character was too strong, vigorous, and impatient to allow melancholy to become habitual to him; he was too young for his fate, however it preyed upon his pride, to be constantly before him; his wife was, indeed, a bitter memory to him, but she was *but* a memory to him now, and a man imperceptibly forgets what is never recalled to him. Except occasional deep fits of gloom and an unvarying cynical sarcasm, De Vigne had cured himself of the utter despondency into which his marriage had first thrown him; the pace at which he lived, if the pleasures were stale, was such as does not leave a man much time for thought, and now, as he rode along, with no sound on his ear except the merry ring of his horse's hoofs on the hard road, some of his naturally bright spirits came back to him, as they generally do, by-the-way, with riding to a man as passionately fond of it as he.

"At home, of course?" he said to Mrs. Lee, as she opened the door to him—said it with that careless hauteur which was the result of habit, not of intention. De Vigne was very republican in his theories, but the patrician came out in him *malgré lui*; it is all very well to talk of equality, but I never knew a man yet with the *sang pur* in him who did not instinctively feel the difference between it and the mud of the gutters, and show that he felt it too, however grand his theorizing the other way.

"Yes, sir," said the old nurse, giving him her lowest curtesy, and gazing on him with admiring eyes, for, as she used to say, she "hadn't lived among the gentlefolk without knowing a real gentleman when she saw one," "Miss Alma's at home. Where should she be, poor little lady, with not a soul to take her out anywhere, and tell her not

to spoil her eyes over them nasty paintings? Yes, sir, she's at home, and there's a young gentleman a calling on her. I'm glad of it; she wants somebody to talk to bad enough. 'Tain't right, you know, sir, for a merry child like that to be cooped up alone; you might as well put a bird in a cage and tie its beak up, so that it couldn't sing! It's that young gentleman as came with you, sir, the other day."

De Vigne stroked his moustaches and smiled.

"Oh, ho! Master Curly's found his way, has he? I thought it would be odd if those longs yeux bleus didn't do some damage in their proper sphere. I dare say she'll be a confounded little flirt, like all the rest of them, when she has the opportunity," was his reflection, more natural than complimentary, as he opened the door of Alma's room, where the little lady was sitting, as usual, in the window, among the birds and flowers De Vigne had sent her; and Curly, handsome dog that he was, graceful as a young Greek—fit ideal for Alcibiades or Catullus while they were in their twenties, their Falernian yet full of flavor, and their rose wreaths still with the morning dew upon them—lying back in a chaise longue, talking to her quite as softly and far more interestedly than he was wont to talk to the beauties in his mother's drawing-room.

But Alma cut him short in the middle of a sentence, as she turned her head at the opening of the door and sprang up joyously at the sight of De Vigne.

"How glad I am! I have been wanting to see you so all this week. The days are so long, always looking for you and never seeing you; but how good you are to come so early."

"Not good at all. I was not in bed till six this morning, and liked an early ride; the air is beautiful to-day. one only wants to be fishing in a mountain burn to enjoy it

thoroughly. "Hallo, Curly!" said De Vigne, throwing himself into an arm-chair; "how are you? How did *you* manage to get up so early? I thought you never were up till after one, except on Derby Day?"

"Or other temptation greater still," said Curly, with an eloquent glance of his long violet eyes at Alma.

"Do you mean that for a compliment to me?" said the Little Tressillian, with that gay, rebellious, moqueur air which was so pretty in her. "In the first place, I do not believe it, for there is no woman on the face of the earth who could attempt to rival a horse; and in the second, I should not thank you for it if I did, for compliments are only fit for empty heads to feed on."

"Meaning, you think yours the very reverse of empty?" said De Vigne, quietly.

"Certainly, it is not empty. I am not a boarding-school girl, monsieur," said Alma, indignantly. "I have filled it with what food I can get for it, and I know at least enough to feel that I know nothing—the first step to wisdom the sages say."

"But if you dislike compliments you might at least accept homage," said Curly, smiling.

"Homage? Oh! yes, as much as you like. I should like to be worshiped by the world, and petted by a few."

"I dare say you would," said De Vigne, stroking her little black kitten, elaborately decorated by Alma in a collar of blue ribbon and gold beads. "I can't say your desires are characterized by great modesty."

"Well, I speak the truth," said Alma, naïvely. "A great deal of women's modest speeches are great falsehoods, on whose telling, however, society smiles as 'the thing.' I *should* like to be admired by the thousands, and loved just by one or two."

"You have only to be seen to have your first wish," said

Curly, softly, "and only to be known to have much more than your second."

Alma turned away impatiently; she had a sad knack of showing when she was annoyed.

"Really you are intolerable, Captain Brandling. You spoil conversation utterly. I say those things because I mean them, not to make you flatter me. I shall talk only to Sir Folko, to Major De Vigne, for he alone understands me, and answers me properly."

With which lecture to Curly the little lady twisted her low chair nearer to De Vigne, and looked up in his face, very much as spaniels look up in their masters', liking a kick from them better than a caress from a stranger.

Curly, sweet-tempered though he was, was a trifle irritated—he was so used to having it all his own way—a very carelessly conquering, lazy Young-England way, too—and was a little astonished at being so summarily put aside by this little Tressillian, whom he had come to see chiefly for the sake of her bright-blue eyes—partly because she had puzzled him, partly (pardon, mademoiselle!—the best of us will think so of the best of you till we have tried you) because he thought he could say what he liked to her, frank, free, and unprotected as she was, and partly because he wanted to see how De Vigne really stood with her; a problem he did not make out any clearer now, for though Alma was certainly very fond of him, she was much too candid about it, Curly reasoned, for anything like love; and De Vigne's calm, amused, quizzical, yet guardian-like manner over her was still further removed by many miles from the grande passion.

But Curly was very sweet-tempered, and in a second he was all right again.

"You are cruelly unjust, Miss Tressillian," he said, playfully. "*I* was telling the truth—a thing you seem greatly

to patronize—and you shut me up as abruptly as if I were committing a crime. You see it was impossible for me to know your tastes. De Vigne has an immense advantage over me in having known you before I did.”

Alma’s eloquent eyes looked as if she thought De Vigne had immense advantages over him in many other respects, but she was too much of a lady to say so of course. She made him a pretty careless bow, as if she was tired of the subject, and turned to De Vigne :

“Have you seen Miss Molyneux lately?” She was rather jealous of Miss Molyneux, having ridden off on an idea that De Vigne saw a great deal of Violet and admired her exceedingly.

“Yes; and not long ago I heard Miss Molyneux envying you!”

“Me! Whatever for? *I* envy *her*, if you like!” cried Alma, brushing up the kitten’s hair becomingly. “How does she know me? What has she heard about me? Who has told her anything of me?”

“Gently, gently, de grâce!” cried De Vigne. “I don’t know that she has heard anything of you, or that anybody has told her anything about you; but she has seen something of yours, and admired it exceedingly.”

“My picture?” asked Alma, breathlessly.

“Your picture; and she said that whoever the artist might be who had painted the lovely face of the boy, she envied her, and wished that she could change places with her.”

“She would not if she knew,” said Alma, with that deep sadness which just now and then welled out of her gay, sunshiny nature, as if in evidence of what the passionate, and generous, and tender character would suffer when she came to the grief De Vigne had prophesied for her.

“Did she go to the exhibition with you, then?”

"Yes; or rather, I went with her."

"How I hate her!" said Alma, with sufficient vehemence, tearing a bit of drawing-paper into strips.

"Et pourquoi?" asked De Vigne, in surprise.

"Because you are always with her, and she is in your circle, and you go about with her, and admire her, and I am shut up here; I must wait till you choose to come and see me, and I have no society to shine in, and——Oh! I hate her!" cried Alma, energetically. I dare say she *could* have hated, not rancorously, but very hotly while it lasted, as most people can who love hotly also.

De Vigne laughed; he was used to Alma's enthusiastic expressions, and set them down to her Southern blood, attaching no importance to them.

"Amiable, I must say, Miss Tressillian, and not very grateful; for Violet Molyneux is prepared to be devoted to you, if she could know you, for having painted that exquisite picture, as she thinks it."

"Ah! my picture!" cried Alma, joyously, her hate and her wrongs passing away like summer shadows off a sunny landscape. "What has been said about it? Has it been liked? Who has seen it? Do the papers mention it? Have the——"

"One question at a time, please, then perhaps I may contrive to answer them," said De Vigne, smiling; "though the best answer to them all will be for you to read these. Here, see how you like that!"

He took a critique by a well-known Art-critic out of his pocket, and gave it to her, pointing out, among many condemnatory notices of other works, the few brief laudatory words in praise of her own, worth more than whole pages of warmer laudation but less discriminating criticism.

"How delightful! how glad I am! Oh, this is beautiful! —this is something like the realization of my dreams!"

cried Alma, rapturously, her eyes beaming, and her whole face in a rose flush of ecstatic delight.

"Wait a minute; reserve your raptures," said De Vigne, putting the *Times*, the *Atlas*, and other papers before her. "If the first review sends you into such a state of exultation, we shall lose sight of you altogether over these."

"Oh, they make me so happy!" exclaimed Alma, when she had read them, with none of the dignity and tranquil pride becoming to a successful artist, but with a wild, gleeful, triumphant delight most amusing, De Vigne told me, to behold. "You won't quite forget me for Miss Molyneux now; she hasn't her name in the papers, has she? I am so delighted! I used to think my pictures would be liked if people saw them; but I never hoped they would be admired like this; and the beauty of it is, that it is all owing to you; without you I should never have had it!"

"Indeed you would, though. I have done nothing. Your picture was clever; it has been seen, and has had its due appreciation, as all clever things have, sooner or later. You have nothing to thank me for, I can assure you."

"I have!" repeated Alma, resolutely. "You knew how I could exhibit it; you did it all for me; but *for* you my picture would now be hanging here, unnoticed and unpraised. You were the first person who admired it, and you know well enough that your few words are of more value to me than all these!" With which Alma tossed over the table, with contemptuous energy, the reviews which had charmed her so intensely a minute or two before.

"Very unwise," said De Vigne, dryly. "These will make your fame and your money; my words can do you no good whatever."

"They do me the best good," said Alma, indignantly. "Do you suppose if you did not like my pictures, that I should care for anybody else's praise?"

"I should say so; I don't see why you shouldn't," said De Vigne. He took a most malicious pleasure in teasing her, in making her eyes grow dark and flash, and the color come into her cheeks in her vehement and demonstrative vexation.

She didn't vouchsafe him any words now, though, but twisted herself away from him with one of her rapid, un-English movements.

"How courteous he is! You are very forbearing, Miss Tressillian, to put up with him!" said Curly, who had been listening, half amusedly, half irritably, to this conversation, which excluded him.

Alma was angry with De Vigne herself, but she was not going to let any one else be so too.

"Forbearing? What do you mean? I should be very ungrateful if I were not thankful for such a friend."

"Now that is too bad," said Curly, plaintively. "I, who really admire your most marvelous talent, only get tabooed for being a flatterer, while he is thought perfection, and pleases by being most abominably rude."

"You had better not measure yourself with him, Captain Brandling," said Alma, with that mischievous impudence which sat well upon her, though no other woman, I believe, could have had it with such impunity.

"Vous me piquez, mademoiselle," said Curly, a great deal too sweet a disposition to be annoyed by pre-eminence given to another, especially to De Vigne, for whom he retained some of the old feeling of Frestonhills vassalage, yet sufficiently taken with the fascinating Little Tressillian to be vexed not to be higher in her good graces. "You will tempt me by your very prohibition to enter the

fight with him. I should not care to dispute the belt with him in most things, but for such a prize——”

“What nonsense are you talking, Curly,” said De Vigne, with that certain chill hauteur now so customary to him, but which Alma had never yet seen in him. “A prize to be fought for must be disputed. Don’t bring hot-pressed compliments here to spoil the atmosphere.”

“That’s right, take my part,” interrupted Alma, not understanding his speech as Curly understood it. “You see, Captain Brandling, that sort of high-flown flattery is no compliment; if the man mean it, it says little for his intellect, for we are none of us angels without wings, as you call us; and if he do not mean it, it says little for ours, for it is easy to tell when a man is really liking or only laughing at us.”

“Indeed!” said Curly. “I wish we were as clear when ladies were liking or laughing at us; it would save us a good many disappointments, when enchanting forms of life and light, who have softly murmured tenderest words when they stole our hearts away in tulle illusion at a hunt ball, bow to us as chillily as to a first introduction when we meet them afterward en Amazone in the Ride, with old Lord Adolphus Fitzpoodle, as rich as he is gouty, on their off-side.”

“Serve you right for being so credulous,” said De Vigne, tickling the kitten with the end of his riding-whip. “Women are either actresses or fools; if they are amiable they are stupid, and if they are clever they are artful.”

“Like Thackeray’s heroines,” suggested Curly.

“Exactly; shows how well the man knows life as it is, not as it should be, for I always hold that the wiser the mind the better ought to be the heart. But the first thing the world teaches a clever woman is to banish her feelings.

Women may thrive on talent, they are certain to go to rack and ruin on feeling; few enough of them have any, and a good thing for them, too."

"I don't agree with you," said Alma, looking up, ready for a combat.

"Don't you, petite?" laughed De Vigne. "I think you will when you have a few more years over your head, and have seen the world a little."

"No, I do not agree with you," returned the Little Tressillian, decidedly, "that life's first lesson is to crush down your feelings both to men and women. I believe that in proportion as you feel so do you suffer; but I deny that all talented women are actresses. Where will you go for all your noblest actions but to women of intellect and mind? Sappho's heart inspired the genius which has come down to us through such lengthened ages. Was it not heart which has immortalized Héloïse? Was it not intellect, joined to their passionate love for their country, which have placed the deeds of Polycrita, Hortensia, Hersillia, Mademoiselle de la Rochefoucauld among the records of patriotism? One of the fondest loves we have heard of was the love of Vittoria Colonna for Pescara, of the woman who ranks only second to Petrarch, the friend of Cardinal Pope, and Bembo, and Catarini, the adored of Michael Angelo, the admired of Ariosto! Oh, you are very wrong; where you find the glowing imagination, there, too, will you find as ardent affections; where there is expansive intellect, there, and there only, will be charity, tolerance, clear perception, just discrimination; with a large brain, a large heart, the more cultured the intelligence, the more sensitive the susceptibilities. Lucy Edgermond would make your tea for you tolerably, and head your table respectably, and blush where she ought, and say Yes and No like a well-bred woman, but in Corinne alone will you find pas-

sion to beat with your own, intellect to match with your own, sympathy, comprehension, elevation, all that a woman *should* give to the man she loves!"

A Corinne in her own way I can fancy she looked, too, with her blue eyes scintillating like two stars in her earnestness, all her own intelligence and talent stamped on her high-arched brow and on her mobile lips; her little silver-toned voice rising and falling in impassioned vehemence, accompanied with her vivacious and unconscious gesticulation, a trick, probably, of her foreign blood. Curly listened to her with amazement and delight, this was something quite new to him; it was not so new to De Vigne, but it touched him with something deeper, more like regret than amusement. A glimpse of the golden land is great pain when we know the door is locked and the key irrevocably lost. It brought over him again his old sarcasm and gloom.

"Do you suppose, petite," he said, with a bitter smile, "that if there *were* Corinnes in the land men would be such fools as to go and take the Lucys of modern society in their stead? Heaven knows, if there were women like what you describe, we might be better men; more earnest in our lives, more faithful in our loves. But you draw from the ideal, I from the real, two altitudes very far wide apart—as far apart, my child, as dawn and midnight."

His tone checked and saddened Alma's bright and enthusiastic but very impressionable nature. She gave a deep, heavy sigh.

"It is midnight with you, I am afraid, and I do so want it to be noon. I wish you would believe in me, at least."

He answered with a laugh, not a real one.

"Too much to promise; I will believe in you as soon as I do in anybody; and as for its being midnight with me, if it is, it is like midnight at a bal d'Opéra, with plenty of gaslights, transparencies, music, and amusement enough

to send the sun jealous, and making believe the day has dawned."

"But, then, don't the gaslights, and transparencies, and all the rest of your bal d'Opéra look tawdry and garish when the day is really up and on them?"

"We never let the daylight in," laughed De Vigne; "and won't remember that we ever had any brighter light than our colored lamps. Why should we? They do well enough for all intents and purposes."

Alma shook her head:

"They won't content you always."

"Oh yes they will; I have no desires now but to live without worry, and die in some good hard fight in harness, like my father."

Alma struck him on the arm with his own riding switch, which she had taken from him to play with the kitten.

"You are naughty and cruel: you say that only to vex me. Do you suppose at thirty-five that you have done with life?"

"Done with life! Certainly not, unless I come to a violent death, as most of my ancestors have done before me. No, my health and my strength are perfect, thank Heaven, notwithstanding I have done my best to impair them; but I have excluded passions, desires, and impulses out of my life—they cost me a vast deal too dear."

Alma looked at him incredulously, with her eyebrows raised.

"I should have thought you too clever a man of the world to talk such folly," said the little lady, impatiently. "In all the vigor, strength, and glory of early manhood, do you suppose it possible for you to ice yourself into a deliberate lifeless stoicism closing round you, as its stony nome shuts in the lily-encrinite? You may fancy your nature is chilled forever, (though why it should be I cannot

imagine,) but be very sure it will rouse itself sooner or later."

"I hope not, that's all I can say," returned De Vigne; "but though you may wake up a sleeping dog, you can't a dead one; don't you know that, young lady?"

"But from a dead phoenix there will rise a new one."

"A phoenix! an unreal thing, a poetic myth! You choose your metaphor badly for your theory, like all these enthusiasts, Curly, eh? Pin them to fact, they are undone in a moment. What! are you going? I'll come with you—that is, if you are going back to town."

"Yes I am," said Curly. "I'm going to a confounded déjeuner in Palace Gardens, that little flirt's, Jerry Mab, I beg her pardon, the Honorable Geraldine Maberly. I shall barely get back in time; it's one o'clock, I vow. How time slips in some places! If I promise to leave compliments, *i.e.* in your case, truth, behind me, may I not come again? Pray be merciful, and allow me."

"How can I prevent you?" said Alma, in a laughing unconsciousness of Curly's meaning glances. "Certainly, come if you like; it is kind of you to think of it, for I am very dull here all alone. I am no philosopher, you know, and cannot make a virtue of necessity, and pretend to take my tub and cabbage-leaves in preference to a causeuse and delicate mayonnaise."

"Capricious, like all your sex. You are asking for compliments now, Alma. On ne loue d'ordinaire que pour être loué," said De Vigne, dryly.

"Am I? I did not mean it so," answered the girl, innocently.

"Nor did I take it so," said Curly, bending toward her as he took her hand; "so I shall not try to say how much I thank you for your permission, but only avail myself of it as often as I can, for the kindness will certainly be to me."

De Vigne stood looking disdainfully on, stroking his moustaches, and thinking, I dare say, what arrant flirts all women were at heart, and what fools men were to pander to their vanities.

He bid her good morning with that careless hauteur which he had often with everybody else but very rarely with the Little Tressillian. Curly's horse was at the door, but his groom had ridden farther down the road with De Vigne's. While he stood at the door waiting for it, he heard Alma's voice:

"Come back a minute."

He went back, as in courtesy bound.

"Did you want me?"

"Yes. Why did you speak so crossly to me?"

"I, crossly! I was not aware of it."

"But I was, and it was not kind of you, Sir Folko."

"Why will you persist in calling me like that knight *sans peur et sans reproche*?" said De Vigne, impatiently. "I tell you I have nothing in common with him—with his pure life and his spotless shield. He did no evil; I do—Heaven knows how much! He surmounted his temptations; I have always succumbed to mine. He had a conscience at ease; mine, if it were a tender one, might be as great a torture as the rack. His past was one of wise thoughts and noble deeds; mine can show neither the one nor the other."

"Of your life you know best; but in your character I choose to see the resemblance, if you choose to see the difference, between you and Montfauçon," replied Alma, always resolute to her own opinion. "Was he not a man of experience, a man who feared nothing, who was fierce to his foes and generous to those who trusted him? As for his past, he had probably drawn experience from error, as men ever do, and learnt wisdom out of folly. And as

for his stainless shield, is not your haughty De Vigne crest as unsullied as when it passed to you?"

"No," said De Vigne, fiercely. "My folly stained it, and the stain is the curse of my life. Child, why did you speak of such things? If you care for my friendship, you must never speak to me of my past."

His face was stern, his dark eyes stormy, and full of the gloom and remorseless pride her words had suddenly awakened—deadly memories were stirring up in him. Most women might have been afraid of him in his haughty anger. She was not. She looked up at him, bewildered, it is true, but with a strange mingling of girlish tenderness and woman's passion, both unconscious of themselves.

"Oh, I will not! Do forgive me. You know I would never willingly say anything to anger you. You do believe me, don't you?"

"Yes, yes, I believe you," said De Vigne, hastily. "Don't exalt me into a god, Alma, that's all, for I am *very* mortal. Good-by, petite!"

He laid his hand on her shoulder with the familiar kindness he had imperceptibly grown into with her, natural to his earlier nature, but very exceptional with his present one; he could hardly look into the clear brilliance of her dark-blue eyes and doubt her—doubt, at least, that she now meant what she said, whether or no she would keep to it.

In another second he was across his horse's back, and riding out of the court-yard with Curly, while Alma stood in the doorway looking after him, shading her eyes from the May sun, which touched up her golden hair and her picturesque bright-hued dress into a brilliant tableau, under the low, dark, brown porch of her cottage home.

Curly rode on quietly for some little way, busying his mind with rolling the leaves round a Manilla, and lighting

it en route, while De Vigne puffed away at a giant Havana, between regulating which and keeping his fidgety Grey Derby quiet, (he usually rode horses that would have thrown any other man but him or M. Rarey,) he had little leisure for road-side conversation.

At last Curly broke silence, twisting his long blonde moustaches with a puzzled smile, and flicking his mare's ears thoughtfully with his whip.

"Well, De Vigne! I don't know what to make of it!"

"Don't know what to make of what?" demanded De Vigne, curtly.

He was a little impatient with his Frestonhills pet. One may not care two straws for pheasant-shooting—nay, one may even have sprained one's arm, so that it is a physical impossibility to lift an Enfield to one's shoulder—and yet so dog-in-mangerish is human nature that one could kick a fellow who ventures to come in and touch a head of our *défendu* or uncared-for game.

"Of that little thing," returned Curly, musingly. "I don't understand her."

"Very possibly."

"Why very possibly? I know a good deal of women, good, bad, and indifferent, but I'll be hanged if I can understand that Little Tressillian. She's so different, somehow, to all the rest of 'em. She has so much sense in her, and yet she is full of life and nonsense. She can touch on all sorts of queer subjects, and speak about a man's life without a trace of boldness. She is so frank and free one *might* take no end of advantage of her; and yet, somehow, deuce take it, one *can't*. The girl's truth and fearlessness are more protection to her than other women's pruderies and chevaux-de-frise."

De Vigne did not answer, but smoked his Havana silently; probably because he thought with Curly, but was not going to say so.

"She is a little darling," resumed Curly, meditatively. "That's the sort of girl I've dreamed about, De Vigne. One feels a better fellow with her—eh?"

"Can't say," replied De Vigne. "I have generally looked on young ladies, for inflammable boys like you, as dangerous stimulants rather than as calming tonics."

"Confound your matter-of-fact," swore Curly. "You may laugh at it if you like, but I mean it. She makes me think of things that one pooh-poohs and forgets in the bustle of the world. She's a vast lot too good to be shut up in that brown old house, with only a kitten to play with, and an old nurse to take care of her."

"She seems to have made an impression on you!" said De Vigne, dryly.

"Certainly she has!" said Curly, gayly. "And, 'pon my life, what makes still more impression on me, De Vigne, is, that you and I, two as wild fellows as ever lived, and pretty well as unscrupulous in that line, I should say, as that much-abused chap, Don Juan, should be going calling on that little thing, and chatting with her as harmlessly as if she were our sister, when we *ought* to be making desperate love to her, if she hadn't such confounded dear trusting eyes of hers that they make one ashamed of one's own thoughts. 'Pon my life, it's very extraordinary!"

"If extraordinary, it is only a man's honor," said De Vigne, with his coldest hauteur, "toward a young, guileless girl, utterly unprotected, save by her own defenselessness—the best protection to any right-feeling man. For my own part, as a 'married man,' (how cold his sneer always grew at those words!) I have no right to 'enter the lists' with you, as you poetically phrased it to-day, even supposing my experiences of passion did not make me, as they do, renounce all such affairs, with no merit in the renunciation; and for yourself, you are too true a gentle-

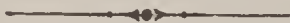
man, Curly, though it is 'our way' to be unscrupulous in such matters, to take unfair advantage of my introduction of you to a girl who is a lady, and deserves to be treated as such, though she has not the entourages of wealth and position to command respect; and, indeed, if you did, I, to whom Mr. Tressillian appealed for what slight assistance I have it in my power to afford her, should hold myself responsible for having made you known to her, and should be bound to take the insult as to myself."

Curly, at the beginning of De Vigne's very calm, but very grandiose speech, opened his lazy violet eyes, and stared at him; but as he went on, all Curly's warmer feelings, and all the native delicacy and generosity that lay at the heart of this young "Adonis of the Guards," too deep for his life to score them out, roused up, and he turned to his old Frestonhills hero with his smile, so *young* in its brightness:

"Quite right, De Vigne. You are a brick; and if I do any harm to that dear Little Tressillian, I give you free leave to shoot me dead like a dog, and should richly deserve it, too. But go and see her I must, for she is worth all the women we shall meet at Jerry's to-day, though they *do* count themselves the *crème de la crème*."

"The *crème de la crème* can be, at the best, only skim," said De Vigne, with his ready fling of sarcasm; "but I am not going to the Maberlys', thank you. Early strawberries and late on dits are both flavorless to my taste; the fault of my own palate, perhaps. I shall go and lunch at the U. S., and play a game or two at pool. How much better I should like billiards, if one could *progress*; but after the first year or two a man has reached his perfection in it, and then he stands still till his eyes and arms fail him. How pleasant the wind is! Grey Derby wants a gallop, let's give him his way."

Palamon and Arcite were not truer or warmer friends than De Vigne and Curly; but, when a woman's face dazzled the eyes of both, the death-blow was struck to friendship, and the seeds of feud were sown.



PART THE THIRTEENTH.

I.

HOW VIVIAN SABRETASCHE BURIED HIS PAST AND AWOKE
TO A GOLDEN PRESENT.

ON the 12th of May Leila Countess of Puffdoff gave a ball, concert, and sort of moonlight fête, all three in one, at her charming dower-house at Twickenham. All our set went pretty nearly, and all the men of Ours, of course, for le feu Puffdoff had been in the Dashers, and out of a tender memory of him, his young widow made enfans de la maison of all the corps; not, one is sure, because Ours was one of the crackest troops in the service, and we were counted the handsomest set of men in all Arms, but out of pure love and respect for our late gouty colonel, who, Georges Dandin in life, became a Mausolus when under the sod. Who upholds that the good is oft interred with our bones? Ce n'est pas vrai, though it is Shakspeare who says it; if you leave your family, or your pet hospital a good many thousands, you will get the cardinal virtues, and a trifle more, in letters of gold on your tomb; if you have lived up to your income, or forgotten to insure, any penny-a-lining La Monnoye will do to scribble your epitaph, and break off with "C'est trop mentir pour cinq écus!" Le fer Puffdoff became "mon mari adoré" as soon as the

grave closed over him; poor cause—"mon mari adoré" had left his handsome countess most admirably well off, and with some of this "last bequest" the little widow gave us a charming fête on this 12th of May. Such things are all so much alike, that, going to one, you ordinarily have gone to all, but this was certainly better than most. The Puffdoff wines were par excellence; the Puffdoff taste admirable; Grisi and Mario, and a number of lesser stars sang à ravir; Violet Molyneux and a number of lesser belles waltzed to perfection; there were as lovely women and as exquisite toilettes as you could wish to see; and there were the fairy-like grounds glistening in the moonlight, with myriad lamps gleaming like diamond clusters among the darkness, and the winter-garden, where, under glass, nature in the tropics was counterfeited so inimitably with fragrant imitations of the rose gardens of the East, the orange groves of southern Europe, and the luxuriant vegetation of the West Indies.

It looked like fairyland, I admit, with its brilliant coloring, its heavy perfumes, its beautiful music. Not Anacreon or Aristippus, Boccaccio or Moore, need have imagined anything more charming to look at—it was only a pity that the people were not Arcadians to enjoy it; that there were such plots and counterplots and fermentations under that smooth surface; such heart-burnings, jealousies, and manœuvres among those soft smiling beauties; such undercurrents of bitterness and ill-nature under the pleasant sunny ripples of social life. What a sad trick one catches of looking *under* everything; it spoils pleasure, for nothing will stand it; but when once one has been sick through chromate of lead, one can't believe in Bath-buns, try how one may! I went to the ball late; De Vigne, much to the Puffdoff's chagrin, chose instead to go to a card party at

Wyndham's, where play was certain to be high. He preferred men's society to women's at all times, and I must say I think he showed his judgment! The first person I saw was Violet, on Curly's arm, with whom she had been waltzing. Brilliant and lovely she looked, with all her high-bred grace and finish about her; but she had lost her color, there was an absence of all that free spontaneous gayety, and there was a certain *distraction* in her eyes, which made me guess the Colonel's abrupt departure had not been without its effect upon our most radiant beauty. She had promised me the sixth dance the previous day in the Park, and, as I waltzed with her, pour m'amuser I mentioned Sabretasche's name casually, when, despite all her sang-froid, a slight flush in her cheeks showed she did not hear it with indifference. When I resigned her to Regalia, (Violet danced as untiringly as a Willis, and the little Duke's one accomplishment was his waltzing,) I strolled through the rooms with the other beauté régnante of the night, Madame la Duchesse de Vieillecour. Good Heavens! what relationship was there between that stately, naughty-eyed woman, with her Court atmosphere about her, her calm but finished coquetteries, and bright-faced, blithe-voiced Gwen Brandling, who had given me that ring under the trees in Kensington Gardens ten years before? Ah, well! Time changes us all. The ring was old-fashioned now; and Madame and I *made love* more amusingly and more wisely, if less truly than earnestly, than in those old silly days when we were *in love*, before I had learned experience and she had taken up prudence and ducal quarterings. I was sitting under one of the luxuriant festoons of creepers in the winter-garden with her excellency; revenging, perhaps a little more naturally than rightly, on Madame de Vieillecour the desertion of Gwen Brandling, (you see, I had loved and lost the latter; I didn't care two straws

for the former;) and I suppose I was getting a trifle too sarcastic in the memories I was recalling to her, for she broke off our conversation suddenly, and not with that subtle tact which Tuileries air had taught her.

"Look! Is it possible? Is not that Colonel Sabretasche? I thought he was gone to Biarritz for his health."

I looked; it *was* Sabretasche, to my supreme astonishment, for his leave had not nearly expired; and in a letter De Vigne had had from him a day or two previous there had been no mention of his intending to return.

"How charming he is, your Colonel!" said Madame de Vieillecour, languidly. "I never met anybody handsomer or more witty in all Paris. Bring him here, I want to speak to him."

"Surprised to see me, Arthur?" said Sabretasche, laughing, as I went up to him, obedient to her desires. "I always told you never to be astonished at anything I do. I am as enigmatical, you know, and as erratic as the Wandering Jew, or the Premier Grenadier du Monde. Madame de Vieillecour there? She does me much honor. Is she trying to make you singe your wings again?"

He came up to her with me, of course, and stood chatting some minutes.

"I am only this moment arrived," he said, in answer to her. "When I reached Park Lane this morning, or rather evening, I found Lady Puffdoff's card of invitation; so I dined, dressed, and came off, for I knew I should meet all my old friends here. Yes, I am much better, thank you; the sweet air of the Pyrenees must always do one good, and then they give all the credit to the Biarritz baths! Shockingly unjust, but what is just in this world? How odd Biarritz looked, by-the-way, with not a fair face or a dyspeptic constitution in it!"

He stayed chatting some moments, though I noticed his

eyes glanced impatiently through the rooms in search of somebody or other he did not see. The air of the Pyrenees had indeed done him good; he did not look like the same man; his listless melancholy, which had grown on him so much during the last month, had entirely worn off; there was a clear mind-at-ease look about him, as if he were relieved of some weight that had worn him down, and there was a true ring about his voice and laugh which had not been there, gay as he was accounted, since I had known him, even when he was ten years younger than he was now. He soon left Madame de Vieillecour, and lounged through the rooms, exchanging a smile, or a bow, or a few words with almost every one he met, for Sabretasche had a most illimitable acquaintance, and all were delighted to see him back; for, without him, things in his set ever seemed at a stand-still.

Violet Molyneux was sitting down after her waltz with Regalia, leaning back on a couch, fanning herself slowly, and attending very little to the crowd of men who had gathered, as they were certain to do, round the beauty of the season. She generally laughed, and talked, and jested with them all, so that her pet friends called her a shocking flirt, (though she was in reality no more of one than any fascinating woman appears, *nolens volens*, and was far too difficult to please to be a coquette;) but to-night she was listless and silent, playing absently with her bouquet, though admiring glances enough were bent upon her, and delicate flattery enough breathed in her ears, to have roused the Sleeping Beauty herself from her trance.

It required more, however, to rouse Violet to-night; that little more she had, in a very soft and musical voice, a voice well accustomed to give meaning to such words, that whispered,—

"How can I hope I have been remembered, when you have so many to teach you to forget?"

She looked up; her violet eyes beamed with such undisguised delight that some of the men smiled, and others swore under their moustaches; her natural wild-rose color came back into her cheeks; in a second she was her own radiant animated self; she gave him her hand without a word, and one of her vassals, a young Viscount, a boy in the Rifles, gave up his place beside her to Sabretasche. Then she talked to him, quietly enough, on indifferent subjects, of Biarritz and Pau, of the Garonne and the Pic-du-Midi, of Bigorre and Gavarnie, as if neither remembered their last strange interview in the Water-Color Exhibition, as if the Francesca were not in both their minds, as if love were not lying at the heart and gleaming in the eyes of each of them.

Sabretasche asked her to waltz; she could not, since she had only the minute before refused Regalia; but she took his arm and strolled into the summer-garden, leaving the full rise and swell of the ball-room music, with the subdued hum and murmur of Society, in the distance.

He spoke of trifles as they passed the different groups that were laughing, chatting, or flirting in the several rooms; but his eyes were on hers, and spoke a more eloquent language. Violet never asked him of his sudden return or his abrupt departure. She was too happy to be with him again to care through what right or reason she was so. Gradually they grew silent, such a silence as is often more expressive than speech, as they strolled on through the conservatories till they stood alone among the rich tropical and southern vegetation. One side of the winter-garden was open to the clear and still May night, where the midnight stars shone on the dark old trees and the white statues, with their lamps gleaming, diamond-like,

between, while the early nightingales sang to the fair spring skies those passionate chants of love and rapture, where-with the other tribes of nature, whom we in our arrogance dare to call the *lower*, touch deep to the heart of man, respond to all his feverish dreams and all his vague desires, and give utterance in their unknown tongue to those diviner thoughts, that yearning sadness, which lie far down unseen in Human nature.

The night was still; there was no sound save the cadence of the distant music and the sweet gush of the nightingales' songs close by; the wind of early summer swept gently in and fanned their heavy perfumes from the glowing leaves of tree and flower, till the air was full of that dreamy and voluptuous beauty of fragrance which lulls the senses and woos the heart to those softer moments which, could they but last, would make men never need to dream of heaven. Such hours are rare; what wonder if to win them we risk all, if *in* them we cry, with the Lotus Eaters,

Let us alone. What is it that will last?
All things are taken from us and become
Portions and parcels of the dreadful Past.
Let us alone. What pleasure can we have
To war with evil? Is there any peace
In ever climbing up the climbing wave?
All things have rest and ripen toward the grave
In silence; ripen, fall, and cease.
Give us long rest, or death; dark death or dreamful ease.

The soft moonlit air trembled with the low sighing of the trees and the swell of the nightingale's note,

———breaking its heart with its strain,
Waiting breathless to die when its music is ended.

The rich radiance within gleamed on the crimson glow of the gorgeous roses and the silvery white of the magnolias

and lilies; the musical fountains fell into their marble basins with harmonious cadence; Sabretasche, in the still beauty of the night, could listen to every breath and hear each heart-throb of the woman he loved, as he looked into her face with all its delicate and impassioned beauty—the beauty of the Francesca. All the passion that was in him stirred and trembled at it; the voluptuous sweetness of the hour chimed delicious music with his thoughts and senses; he bent over her with all the fondness and tenderness she had awakened:

“Violet!”

It was only one word he spoke, but in it all was uttered to them both.

She lifted her eyes to his; he put his arms round her and drew her to his heart, pressing his lips on hers in kisses long and passionate as those that doomed Francesca. And the stars shone softly, and the flowers bowed their lovely heads, and the nightingales sang joyously under the sweet May skies, while two passionate human hearts met and were at rest.

“Violet, my love, my dearest, you are mine!” murmured Sabretasche, fondly leaning over her with the gentle and earnest tenderness that lay in the character of this soi-disant gay and heartless flirt.

“Yours for life and death—yours forever!” answered Violet, looking up into his eyes, then drooping her head upon his shoulder, with a blush raised by the fervid gaze she met.

“God bless you!” He was too deeply moved to find his usual eloquence. It was eloquence enough between them to be there heart to heart, with the love pent up of late in both expressed in that fond and silent communion.

“Darling,” whispered Sabretasche, after many minutes had passed away, “you give me your love, though I seemed

so long to reject it! You can never guess all that I have suffered, all my temptations, all my struggles. I have much to tell you—you alone; but not to-night. I can think of nothing but my own happiness; it is so long since I have been happy! Twenty years! longer than your life, Violet!”

“And I can make you happy?”

“Yes!” He said it with a sigh of delight, as of a man who throws off his heart a heavy burden carried through lengthened years. “Happy as I never hoped—as, since my boyish days, I never dreamed—as certainly my life has never merited! My love has been a curse to many women, Violet; it shall never be so to you. But I do not deserve to have a woman’s heart all that yours is to me—all that you make it to me, with your noble trust, your frank affection, your high intelligence, your generous soul. I have loved many before you; I shall never love others after you. You have roused all the passions of my youth, all the tenderness of my manhood. To make your peace I would lay down my life to-night, and without you that life would be a curse insupportable. My own love, my last love! what words can tell you all you are to me? If passion had no other utterance than speech, it would remain unspoken!”

He rested his lips on her brow, his heart throbbing loud against hers. They stayed long in their delicious solitude, while the stars grew clearer in the May midnight, and the nightingale’s song sweeter, and the scent of the flowers mingled with the fountain’s silvery play; and Violet Molyneux learned all the depths of tenderness, gentleness, and affection yearning for response, which lay hid from the world’s eye, as silver lies deep in the core of the earth, in the heart of this man, whom society counted as a roué without conscience, of perfect taste and utter heartless-

ness, as fatal to her sex as he was charming to them, a *lion* who could be touched by nothing, an *âme damnée* only to be countenanced because he was rich, courted, and the fashion!

When they went back into the ball-room the waltz had its charm, the music its melody, the flowers their fragrance again, for Violet; for a touch of the hand, a glance of the eye was sufficient eloquence between them, and his whispered good night, as he led her to her carriage, was dearer to her than any flattery poet or prince had ever breathed; nay, she was so happy that she even smiled brightly on Regalia, to her mother's joy—so happy, that when she reached the solitude of her own chamber, she threw herself on her knees in her glittering gossamer ball-dress, and thanked God for the new joy of her life with as unchecked and impetuous tears of rapture as if she had been Little Alma in her cottage home rather than the beauty of the season, with coronets at her feet.

Lord Molyneux was a poor Irish peer; Sabretasche was rich, of high family, bien reçu in the most exclusive circles, a man whose word was law, whose pre-eminence in fashion and ton was acknowledged, whose admiration was honor, and at whose offer of marriage, if he had condescended to make any, no parent in all town, though the Colonel *was* a commoner, would have failed to feel ecstatically delighted au fond de son cœur. His social position was so good, his settlements would be so unexceptionable, why! even our dear saint, the Bishop of Comet-Hock, though he shook his head over Sabretasche's sins, and expressed his opinion with considerable certainty concerning the warmth of his ultimate reception—you know where—would have handed him over, with the greatest eagerness, either of his pretty, extravagant daughters, had the Colonel deigned to ask for one of them. Therefore, when Sabretasche called on him

the morning after Leila Puffdoff's ball, and made formal proposals for Violet, Jockey Jack, though considerably astonished—as society had settled that Sabretasche would never marry as decidedly as it had settled that he was Mephistopheles in fascinating guise—was excessively pleased, assented readily, and had but one drawback on his mind—*telling his wife*—that lady having set her affections on things above, namely, little Regalia's balls and strawberry-leaves. However, Lady Molyneux's chief aim was to marry her daughter somehow as early as possible, so as not to have two milliners' bills to pay and so attractive a face always out with her, and she assented languidly, not by any means particularly pleased, but having no earthly grounds on which to object to such a man and such an offer. So Sabretasche was received into the Molyneux family, and made himself welcome there, as he always could everywhere when he took the trouble, with his indolent grace, his patrician pride, and his calm courtesy, which somehow compelled extremest courtesy in return.

When he came out of Jockey Jack's study that morning, he naturally took his way to Violet's boudoir, where his young love sat, a book it is true in her lap, but her lips parted, and her eyes resting on his statuette of her greyhound, in a sweet dream of "yesterday." She sprang up as he entered, with such delight in her face, so fond a smile, and so bright a blush, that Sabretasche thought he had never seen anything of half so much beauty, sated as he had been with beauty all his days.

"How lovely you are, Violet!" he said, involuntarily, some minutes after, as he sat beside her on the couch, passing his hand over the soft perfumed hair that rested against his arm.

"Oh, do not you tell me that. So many do!" cried Violet. "I like *you* to see in me what no one else sees "

"I see a great deal in you that no one else sees; whole tableaux of heart and mind, that no one else can have a glance at," said Sabretasche, smiling. "But I am proud of your beauty, my lovely Francesca, for all that; though it may be a fact patent to all eyes."

"Then I am glad I have it," said Violet, naïvely. "I love you to be proud of anything in me you know. I would be a thousand times worthier of you if I could."

"The difficulty 'to be worthy' is not on your side," said he, with a shade of his old sadness. "I cannot bear to think that a life so pure as yours should be dedicated to a life so impure as mine. How spotless is your past, Violet—how dark is mine!"

"But how few have been my temptations—how many yours!" interrupted Violet. "A woman—especially an unmarried one—is so fenced in and guarded by society and her home, that her virtue is little merit. What heavy punishment would fall on her if she departed from it! But with men it is so different; from the moment they are launched into the world temptations and incentives assail them on every side, and meet them at every turn. All things combine to lure them into pleasure, and they are no gods to resist the nature with which they are created. Society, custom, their companions, their literature, their amusements—all are so many Circe's wiles; and when they yield to them, they know society will grant them impunity. Everything tempts them; and if they are tempted, they only yield to the bias with which they were born, being mortal men and not marble statues. The world loves condemning. It would do well I think to remember the baits it itself throws out—baits to which all men, sooner or later, more or less, openly or *sub rosâ*, yield. If you have anything to tell me, tell it fearlessly. I shall not love you the less, through whatever fires you may have passed. A

woman's office is to console, not to censure; and if a man has trust in her enough to reveal any of his past sins or sorrows to her, her pleasure should be to teach him to forsake them and forget them in a fresher, fairer, happier existence."

"My precious Violet! God bless you for your noble love! If my care and tenderness can ever repay it, your future shall reward you," whispered Sabretasche, with a deep sigh of rest, in the full and complete happiness he had at last attained. "What I have chiefly to tell you is of wrongs done to me—wrongs that have sealed my lips to you till now—wrongs that have weighed on me for twenty long years, and made me the enigmatical and wayward man I probably have seemed. It is a long story, darling, but one I would rather you should know before you fully give yourself to me."

She looked up at him with a fond smile, a silent promise that in heart she *was* already given to him; and leaning against him, with his arm round her, and her hand in his, Violet listened to the story—that every different scandal-monger had guessed at, and each separate coterie tried, and vainly tried, to probe—the story of the Colonel's early life.

II.

THE SKELETON THAT SOCIETY HAD NEVER SEEN.

"You know," began Sabretasche, "that I was born and educated in Italy, and indulged in all things by my father, (who loved me tenderly for the sake of my young mother, whom he had idolized, and who had died when I was six years old,) and, accustomed to every luxury, I grew up with much of the softness, voluptuousness, and fervent

short-lived passion of the Italian character, while at fifteen I knew life as many a man of five-and-twenty, brought up in seclusion and puritanism here, does not. But though I was an officer in the Neapolitan service, and first in pleasure and levity among the young Italian noblesse, I was still impressionable and romantic, with too much of the poetry and imagination of the country in me to be blasé, though I might be inconstant. I never recall the memory of my youth, *up to twenty*, without regret—it was so full of enjoyment, of soft dreams, sweet as an idyl from my rich imagination, of delicious pleasures, which had all the charm of freshness, all the gusto of youth, changing each day with the brilliance and rapidity of kaleidoscopic pictures, one chased away by another, none leaving a shadow behind! In the summer of my one-and-twentieth year I left Naples, during the hot season, to stay with a friend of mine, whose estates lay in Tuscany. You were in Tuscany last year. How fair the country is under the shadow of the Apennines, with its brown olive woods and its glorious sunsets! It is strange how the curse of its ingratitude to its noblest sons still clings to it, so favored by nature as it is! Della Torre's place was some six or seven miles from Sienna. I had gone up to Florence previously with my father, whose oldest friend was the then consul there; and traveling across Tuscany when malaria was then rife, a low fever attacked me. I was traveling vetturino—there were no railways there in those days—and my servant, finding that I was much too ill to go on, stopped of his own accord at a village not very far from Cachiano. The single act of a servant, who would have died to serve either me or my father—poor fellow, he was shot down the other day among hundreds of insurgents by Bomba—grew into the curse of my life. The name of the village was Montepulto. I dare say you passed through

it; it is beautifully placed, its few scattered houses, with their high peaked roofs, standing among the great groves of chestnuts and the gray thickets of olives, with sunny vineyards and tangled brushwoods of genista and myrtle lying in the glowing Tuscan sunlight. There Anzoletto stopped of his own accord. I was too ill to dissent; and as the carriage pulled up before the single wretched little inn the place afforded, the priest of the village, who was passing, offered me the use of his own house. I had hardly power to accept or refuse, but Anzoletto seized on the offer eagerly; I believe he would have thought a Crown prince honored by giving house-room to his young milor, and I was conveyed to the priest's house, where, for nine or ten days, I knew nothing, or next to nothing, of what passed, except that I suffered and dreamt. When I awoke from a deep sleep one evening into consciousness, I saw the red sunset streaming through the purple vine around my lattice, Anzoletto asleep by my bedside, and a woman of great beauty watching me: of great beauty, Violet, but not your beauty either. It seemed to me then the face of an angel: afterward, God forgive her! I knew it as the face of a fiend. She was Sylvia da Castrone, the niece, some said the daughter, of the priest of Montepulto. She was then three-and-twenty—when men love women their own age, or older, no good can come of it—and very beautiful: a Tuscan beauty, with a delicate Roman profile, blonde hair, and, what is rare for an Italian, a very fair, white skin, and long, large, dark eyes; a lovely woman, in fact, with perfect contour, and a certain languid grace that charmed one like music. She had, too, a certain aristocracy of air. The priest himself was of noble though decayed family; a sleek, silent, suave man, discontented with his humble position in Montepulto, but meek and lowly-minded, according to his own telling, as a religieux

could be. I awoke to see Sylvia da Castrone by my bedside, I recovered to have her constantly beside me, to gaze on her dangerous charms in the equally dangerous lassitude of convalescence. There is a certain languid pleasure in recovery from illness when one is young that makes all things seem *couleur de rose*; to me, with my impressionable senses and my Southern temperament, there was something in this seclusion amidst all that is softest and fairest in nature, shared with one as beautiful as the scenes among which I found her, which appealed irresistibly at once to poetry and passion, then the two most dominant elements in my character, in my dreams, and in my desires, with which no ambitions greater than those of pleasure, and no pains harsher than those of love, had at that time mingled. Sufficient to say, I began to love Sylvia the first day her fair face bent over my couch; as I recovered with renovated strength, my love grew, till sense, prudence, keen-sightedness, all that might have restrained me, were submerged in it. I loved her fondly, tenderly, honorably, as ever man could love woman. I decked her in all the brilliant hues of a poet's fancy, I thought her the realization of all my sweetest ideals, I believed I loved for all eternity. I never stopped to learn her nature, her character, her thoughts; I never paused to learn if she in any way accorded to all my requirements and ideas; I loved her—I *married her!* Heavens, what that madness has cost me!”

The memory came over him with a deadly shudder; at its recollection the fell shade it had so long cast on him returned again, and he pressed Violet convulsively to his heart, as if with her warm, young love to crush out the burden of that cold and cruel dead one. Violet was very pale; the intelligence of his marriage cast a death-like chill over her—the first gloom her bright life and high

spirits had ever known; but even in that her first impulse was to console him. She lifted her head and kissed him, the first caress she had ever offered him, as if to show, more tenderly than words could give them, her sympathy and her affection. As silently and as fondly Sabretasche thanked her for the delicacy and comprehension which were so grateful to him, and with an effort he resumed his story.

“We were married—by the priest Castrone, and for a few weeks Montepulto was heaven to me, and I believed my fondest and fairest dreams were realized. Violet, my darling, do not let my story pain you. All men have many early loves before they reach that fuller and stronger one which is the crown of their existence. I was happy, then, when I was a boy, and when you were not born, my Violet!—but you will give me still greater happiness, as passionate, and more perfect. We were married; and for a week or two the surrender of my liberty seemed trifling pay indeed for the rapture it had brought me. The first shock back to actual life was a letter from my father. I dared not tell him of my hasty step; not from any anger that I should have met, but from the grief it would have caused him, for the only thing he had ever interdicted to me was an early or an unequal marriage. Fortunately, the letter was only to ask me to go to England on some business for him. I went, of course, taking Sylvia with me; and while in London, at her suggestion, (it did not occur to me, or I should have made it,) we had the ceremony again performed in a Protestant church, the rectory-church at Marylebone. She said it pleased her to be united to me by the religion of my country as well as of her own. I loved her, and believed her, and was only too happy to make still faster, if I could, the church fetters which bound me to a woman I idolized! We were a month or two in England.

I took her into Wales and to the Lakes; then we returned to Italy, and I bought for her a pretty little villa just outside Naples, where every spare moment that I had formerly given to dissipation or amusement, or idle dreaming by the sea-shore, I now gave to my wife. Oh, my darling! that any should have borne that title before you! Gradually now dawned on me the truth which she had carefully concealed during our earlier intercourse; that, graceful, gentle, perfect lady as she was in seeming, her temper was the temper of a devil, her passions such as would have disgraced the vilest woman in a street-brawl. Can you not fancy, Violet, what it was to me, with my taste, as it always has been over-sensitive and refined, accustomed at home to have ever the gentlest tones and the softest voices, abhorring an approach to what was harsh, or vulgar, or unharmonious, to hear the woman I worshiped meet me, if I was a moment later than she expected, or the presents I brought her a trifle less costly than she had anticipated—meet me with a torrent of reproaches and invectives, to see her beautiful features distorted with fury, her soft eyes lurid with flame, her coral lips quivering with deadly venom, railing alike at her dogs, her servants, and her husband!—a fury—a she-devil! Good Heavens! what fiercer torment can there be for man, than to be linked for life with a vixen, a virago? None can tell how it wears all the beauty of his life away; how, surely, like the dropping of water on a stone, it eats away his peace; how it lowers him, how it degrades him in his own eyes, how it drags him down to her own level, until it is a miracle if it do not rouse in him her own coarse and humiliating passions! Looking back on those daily scenes of disgrace and misery, which grew, as week and month rolled by, each time worse and worse, when my words ceased to have the slightest weight, I wonder how I endured them as I did; yet what is more incredible still, I

yet loved her, loved her despite the hideous deformity of her fiendish nature; for a *virago* is a fiend, and of the deadliest sort. Still, though my life grew a very agony to me, and the weight of my secret from my father grew unbearable—I dared not tell him, he was in such delicate health the shock might have been fatal—I was never neglectful of her. Strange as it seems, little as the world would believe it, I was most constant to, and most patient with her. I have done little good in my life, God knows; but in my duty as a husband to her, boy as I was, I may truly say I never failed. Not quite twelve months after our marriage, Sylvia gave birth to a daughter. I was very sorry. I am not domestic—never shall be—and a child was the last inconvenience and annoyance I should have wished added to the *ménage*. I hoped, however, that it might soften her temper. It did not; and my life became literally a curse to me.

“At this time Sylvia’s brother came to Naples, a showy, handsome, vulgar young man, with none of her exterior delicacy and aristocracy, who had been my detestation in Montepulito; for anything that shocked my refinement was always, as you are aware, to my fastidious senses, unbearable and intolerable. Naturally he came to his sister’s house, though he had no liking for me, and I believe our antipathy was mutual; but he quartered himself on his sister, for he was poor, and had nothing to do, and I generally found him there when I went to her villa, which was as often as I was free from military duties, or from my father’s house, and could get away without observation from my brother officers and the gay whirl of Neapolitan society, where I was a *lion* and a pet. Almost invariably, when I went there after Guiseppe da Castrone’s arrival, I found him and some of his friends—rollicking, do-nothing, vulgar *mauvais sujets*, like himself—smoking and drinking

there ; while Sylvia, decked with her old smiles, and adorned in the rich dress it had been my delight to bestow on her, lay on her soft couch. She had all the languor and indolence of a Southern, flirting her fan or touching her guitar ; her lovely voice had been one of her greatest charms for me, but, once married, she never took the trouble to let me hear it. The men were odious to me, accustomed as I was to the best society of the old Italian noblesse, and born with only too sensitive a disgust for a common tone and mauvais ton, but I was so sick and heart-weary of the constant contentions and storms that awaited me in my wife's home, that I was glad of the presence of other persons to prevent the tête-à-tête, which was certain to be a scene of passion and abuse, and to restore the smiles to the face which for me now only wore a frown or a sneer. The chief visitor at Sylvia's house was a friend of her brother's—an artist of the name of Lani—a young fellow of five or six-and-twenty, who considered himself an Adonis, I believe, for he was exceedingly handsome, in a coarse, full-colored style, though utterly detestable in my ideas, with his loud voice, his vulgar fopism, and his would-be wit. He pleased Sylvia, however ; a fact to which I never attached any importance, for I was not at all of a suspicious or skeptical nature then, and I am never one of those who think that a woman must necessarily be faithless to her husband because she likes the society of another man ; on the contrary, a husband's hold on her affection must be very slight, if, to keep it, he must subject her to a seclusion almost conventual. Fidelity is no fidelity unless it has opportunity to swerve if it choose. So, though I received the furies, he the smiles, to be jealous of Lani never occurred to me. I, haughty, refined, courted Vivian Sabretasche, to condescend to jealousy of this vulgar, presumptuous, coarse-minded young fellow !—I could never have stooped

to it, had it even occurred to me, which it never did, for I held my own honor infinitely too high to dream that another could sully it. My trust and my security were rudely destroyed! Six months more went on. Sylvia clamored ceaselessly for the acknowledgment of our marriage; in vain I pleaded to her that my father was on his death-bed, that the physicians told me that the slightest mental shock would end his existence, and that as soon as ever I had lost him, which must be at farthest in a few months' time, I would acknowledge her as my wife, and take her to England, where large property had just been left me. Such a plea would, you would think, have been enough for any woman's heart. It availed nothing with her; she made it the occasion for such awful storms of execration and passion as I pray Heaven I may never see in woman or man again. I refused to endanger my father's life to please her caprices. The result was a scene so degrading to her, so full of shame and misery to me, that for several days I could not bring myself to enter her presence again. My love was gone, trampled under her coarse and cruel invectives. In the place of my lovely and idolized wife I found a fiend, and I repented too late the irrevocable folly and the iron fetters of an early marriage, the curse of so many men. When at last I went to the house of my wife, which *should* have been my home, and *was* my hell, the windows of some of the rooms which looked on to a veranda stood open; I walked up the gardens and through those windows into the rooms unannounced, as a man in his own house thinks he is at liberty to do. How one remembers trifles on such days of anguish as that was to me! I remember the play of the sunshine on the ilex-leaves, I remember how I brushed the boughs of the magnolias out of my path as I went up the veranda steps. Unseen myself, I saw Lani and my wife; his arms were round her, her head upon his

breast, and I caught words which, though insufficient for law, told me of her infidelity. God help me! what I suffered! Young, unsuspecting, acutely sensitive, painfully alive to the slightest stain upon my honor, to be deplaced by this vulgar, low-bred rival! Great Heavens! how bitter was my shame!"

Violet's hands clinched on his in a passion of sympathy for him and horror at his wrongs:

"Oh, Vivian, my dearest! how I grieve for you! how I hate her! Would to Heaven I could avenge it on her!"

"Death *has* avenged me, my darling!" said Sabretasche, gravely, gently soothing the vehement emotion his story had roused in Violet's warm and impassioned nature before he resumed his narrative. "Those few words that fell on my ear in the first paralyzed moment of dim horror at the treachery which had availed itself of my unsuspecting hospitality to rob me of my honor, were sufficient for me. Even then I had memory enough to keep myself from stooping to the degradation of a spy, and from lowering myself before the man who had betrayed me. I went farther into the room, and they saw me. Lani had the grace to look guilty and ashamed; for only the day before he had asked me to lend him money, and I had complied, he knowing all the while what reward he was giving me. I remember being perfectly calm and self-possessed; one often is in hours of the greatest suffering or excitement. I motioned him to the door: he slunk out like a hound afraid of a double thonging. The fellow had neither conscience, spirit, nor courage; he was a coward, and craven-hearted as those under-bred men often are at heart. He went out, and I was left alone with Sylvia—with my wife. Do you wonder that for nineteen years I have loathed and abhorred that title, holding it as a synonym with all that is base, and treacherous, and shameful—a curse from which

there is no escape—a clog, rather than take which into his life a man had better forego all love, all pleasure, all passion—a mess of porridge with poison in the cup, for which he must give up all the priceless birthright of liberty and peace, never enjoyed and never valued till they are lost forever, past recall?

“Do you think there was any shame, remorse, repentance on her face, any regret for the abuse of all my confidence, any sorrow for the true affection she had outraged, any consciousness of the fidelity thus repaid, of the trust thus returned? No; in her face there was only a devilish laugh. She met me with a sneer and a scoff; she had the brazen falseness to deny her infidelity, for she knew that admission would divorce her and give me freedom; and when I taxed her with it, she only answered with invectives, with violence, insult, and opprobrium. It ever seemed as if a devil entered into her when she became possessed with that fearful and fiend-like passion. I will not sully your ears with all the disgraceful details of the scene where a woman, at once a virago and a liar, gave reins to her fell passions, and forgot sex, truth, all things, even common decency of language or of conduct; suffice it, it ended in worse violence still. As I rose, to leave her forever, and end the last of these horrible interviews, which destroyed all my self-respect and withered all my youth, she sprang upon me like a tigress, and struck at my breast with a stiletto, which lay on a table near, among other things of curious workmanship. Strong as I was at that time, I could scarcely master her—a furious woman is more savage in her wrath than any beast of prey; she clung to me, yelling hideous words, and striking blindly at me with her dagger. Fortunately for me, the stiletto was old and blunt, and could not penetrate through the cloth of my coat. By sheer force I wrenched myself from her grasp, seized her wrists, unclinchd her fingers from

the handle of the dagger, and left her prostrate, from the violence of her own passions, her beautiful hair unloosened in the struggle, her hands cut and tore in her own wild fencing with the stiletto, her eyes glaring with the ferocity of a tigress, her coral lips covered with foam. From that hour I never saw her face. Last week I read the tidings of her death."

Sabretasche paused. He had not recalled the dread memory of his marriage without bitter pain; never till now had his lips breathed one word of his story to a living creature, and he could not lift the veil from the secret buried for eighteen years without some of the murderous air from the tomb poisoning the freer, purer atmosphere he now breathed. It had a strangely strong effect on Violet. All the color fled from her lips and cheeks; she burst into convulsive sobs, and trembling painfully, shrank closer into the Colonel's arms, as if the dead wife could come and claim him from her, his new young love, idolized so tenderly, wooed so fondly, with so bright and cloudless a future open before her.

Gently and tenderly Sabretasche caressed and calmed her.

"My precious Violet, I would not have told you my story if I had known how it would pain you. I did not like you to be in ignorance of my previous marriage, and I could not tell you the fact without telling you also the history of the wretched woman who held from me the title you have promised me to bear. But do not let it weigh on you, dearest. Great as my wrongs were, I can forgive them now. She can harm me no longer; and you will teach me in the sunshine of your presence to forget the deadly shadow of her past. I will tell you no more to-day, you look so pale. What will your mother say to me for sending away your brilliant bloom? She likes me

little enough already ! Do you wish me to go on ? Then promise me to give me my old gay smiles ; I should be sad, indeed, for my early fate to cast the slightest shade on your shadowless life. Well, I left her, as I said. It is useless to dwell on the anguish, the misery, the shame which had crowded into my young heart. If I had not cared for her it would not have stung me so keenly, but I *had* loved her generously and truly and faithfully until then. To have my name stained, my wife stolen from me, by such as that low-bred and spiritless cur, and to know that to this woman I was chained for life, fettered till one or other of us should be laid in the grave !—it was enough to drive a man of one-and-twenty to any recklessness or any crime. With that shame and horror upon me, I had to watch over the dying hours of my father. He died, very shortly afterward, in my arms, gently and peacefully, as he had spent his life. I saw the grave close over one from whom I had never had an angry word or a harsh glance, and at once reckless and heart-broken, I came to England. I took legal advice about my marriage ; they told me it was perfectly legal and valid, and that the evidence, however morally and rationally clear, was not strong enough to dissolve the unholy ties which bound me to one whom in my heart I knew as a virago, a liar, an adulteress, who would, if she could, have added murder to her list of crimes. Of her I never had heard a word. I left her, at once and forever, to her lovers and her fell passions.”

“Did the child die?” asked Violet. “I wish you had had no child, Vivian. I am jealous of anything and everything that has ever been yours ; and, my Heaven ! how I hate that woman and all belonging to her ! Sin or no sin, I would give all I have on earth to revenge you. My dearest, my dearest ! that *you* should have been so wronged

Oh! pray God that I may live and make atonement to you."

"God reward you, my darling!" murmured Sabretasche, fondly. "You need be jealous of nothing in my past; Violet, none have been to me what you are and will be. I never remembered the child. She was nothing to me; how could I even know that she was mine? But some years afterward, they told me she had died in infancy. So best with such a mother! What could she but be now? I came to England, joined the Dashers, and began the life I have led ever since, plunging into the wildest dissipations, to try and still the fatal memories that stirred within me, revenging myself on that heartless and false sex whom I had before trusted and worshiped, gaining for myself the reputation, to which your mother and the rest of the world still hold, of a fascinating vaurien and an unscrupulous profligate, none guessing how my heart ached while my lips laughed; how, skeptical by force, I yet longed to believe; and how, amidst my pleasures and sedatives, excitements and stimulants, the heart of my boyhood craved to love and be loved! Three years after my arrival here, the sight of Guiseppe da Castrone recalled to me the past in all its hideous horror. What errand do you think he, shameless as his sister, came upon? None less than to extort money from me by the threat, in Sylvia's name, that she would come over to England and proclaim herself my wife. I was weak to yield his demand to him, and not to have the servants show him at once out of the house; but money was plentiful, his presence was loathsome; the idea of seeing Sylvia, of being forced to endure her presence, of having the mistress of young Lani known in England as my wife, was so horrible to me, that, without thinking, I snatched at the only means of security. I paid him what he asked—exorbitant, of course—and hung that other mill-

stone round my neck for life ! But I would have given half my fortune to avoid the bitter disgrace of my marriage being known, and brought constantly before me ; and a thousand out of the large income Moncrieff had left me seemed well paid, even every year or two, to avert the horror of her presence. From that time to within the last twelvemonth her brother has come to me, whenever his and her exchequer failed ; she was not above living on the husband she had wronged ! For nineteen years I kept my secret ; all I had to remind me of my fatal tie was the annual visit of Castrone. Can any one wonder that when I met you I forgot oftentimes my own fetters, and, what was worse, your danger ? In my many loves I had only, I confess, sought pleasure and revenged myself on Sylvia's sex—how could I think well or mercifully of women ? But you roused in me something infinitely stronger, deeper, and more tender. In you the soft idyls of my lost dreams lived again ; with you the grace and glory of my lost youth returned ; in you, for the first time, I realized all I had sacrificed in relinquishing my liberty. Before, as a man of the world—bitterly as I feel the secret disgrace of it—I had experienced no inconvenience from the tie. I had wooed many lightly, won them easily, forsaken them recklessly. None of the three could I do with you. *They* had only charmed my senses ; *you*, in addition, won into my heart ; they had amused me, you grew dear to me—a wide difference, Violet, in a woman's influence upon a man. At first, I confess I flirted carelessly with you, without thinking, as it had been my habit of doing with all women as fair as you are, without remembering my fetters or your danger. But when the full beauties of your heart and mind, rarer even than the rare beauty of your form and features, unfolded themselves to me for the first time, I remembered mercy, even while I learnt that for the last

time I loved. How great were my own sufferings I need not to tell you. Unable to bear the misery of constant intercourse with you, conscious in myself that if long under the temptation I should give way under it and say words for which, when you knew all, you might learn to hate me——”

“Oh, never, never!” whispered Violet, fondly. “I should always love you, Vivian, come what might.”

Sabretasche passed his hand fondly over her high-arched brow; his manner, always most soft and gentle, had deepened into a singularly loving tenderness with Violet, around whom all the inborn poetry and depth of feeling, which in its strength almost amounted to melancholy in this soi-disant gay and fashionable *âme damnée* of aristocratic circles, had now gathered and intensified.

“My darling, I knew well that you would. But it was the very consciousness that, *if* you loved, you would love very differently to the frivolous and inconstant women of our set, which roused me into mercy to you, where with others I had always forgotten it, for the simple reason that they never merited it or needed it. So I left for the south of France, to give myself time for reflection, or—vain hope!—to forget you, as I had forgotten many; to give you time to find, if it so chanced, some one who, more worthy of your attachment, would reward it with the legitimized happiness which the world allows and smiles upon approvingly. I traveled to the Pyrenees. In a week from leaving London I was in Biarritz, intending to go on eastward into the Orientales, to stay there for some time for the sake of the sea-bathing; but the first evening I was at Biarritz I took up, over my chocolate, an Italian newspaper—how it chanced to come there I knew not—it was the *Nazionale* of Naples. Among the deaths I read that of my wife! Great Heaven! that a husband’s first thoughts should be a thanksgiving for the death of the woman he

once fondly loved, over whose sleep he once watched, and in whom he once reposed his name, his trust, his honor! Violet, what I felt when that single line in the Italian journal gave me back liberty, life, youth, everything that existence holds of brightest and sweetest in giving me *you*, words could never say! I read it over and over again, the letters danced and swam before my eyes; I, whom the world says nothing can disturb or ruffle, shook in every nerve, as I leaned out into the evening air, dizzy and delirious with the rush of past memories and future hopes that surged over my brain. With that one fateful line I was *free*! No prisoner ever welcomed liberty with such rapturous ecstasy as I. The blight was off my life, the curse was taken from my soul, my heart beat free again as it had never done during the twenty long years that the bitter shame and misery of my marriage had weighed upon me. Love and youth and joy were mine again. A new existence, fresher and fairer, had come back to me. My cruel enemy, she who had corroded my life with her fiend-like and venomous tongue, who had given my honor to a low-bred cur, only fit to associate with my footmen, and who had yet stooped to live on the money she robbed from the boy-husband she had wronged, was dead, and I at last was free—free to offer to you the truest and fondest love man ever offered woman—free to receive at your hands the golden gifts, robbed from me for so long. Violet—dearest, I know that I shall not ask for them in vain.”

She lifted her face to his with broken yet eloquent words, still greater eloquence in her eyes gleaming with unshed tears; and as his lips lingered upon hers, the new youth and joy he coveted came back to Sabretasche, never, as fondly thought, to leave him again while both their lives should last.

PART THE FOURTEENTH.

I.

ONE OF THE SUMMER DAYS BEFORE THE STORM.

"You look down in the mouth, old boy," said Tom Severn, of the Queen's Bays, to Regalia, at that lavish pleasant affair, a mess-breakfast, which the Guards were giving to us.

"Regalia's in deep for Philaster, and he's going lame," suggested Curly.

"No; he's turned over Julia for La Vivonne, and the inconstancy's weighing on his mind," put in Rushbrooke of Ours.

"Wrong, all of you!" laughed Monckton, who always said an ill-natured thing if he had the opportunity. "Regalia's done for, since Sabretasche has cut in and carried off that handsome Molyneux girl!"

"Regalia's plenty of fellow-sufferers, then," said De Vigne, who, with all his cynicism, always came to anybody's rescue if he thought them ill treated. "I expect there'll be no end of Found Drowned in the Serpentine, since Sabretasche has committed himself—of women for him! of men for her! Violet is positively an injury to the service!"

"Court-martial her!" cried Curly. "She'd look devilish pretty drummed through a regiment!"

"I am sorry," continued De Vigne, pathetically, "that Sabretasche is going to marry. I never dreamed he would. I should as soon have thought of his turning brewer, or writing a book on the Millennium. It is such a pity!

He is such a charming fellow as he is! His little dinners are perfection, and I never enjoy lansquenet anywhere so much as at his house."

"Selfish enough, De Vigne, I must say," said I, laughing. "It would be rather hard to deprive poor Sabretasche of his love because you like his lansquenet. But take courage: we shall have him and his card-parties all the same. Violet's not the sort of girl to put a stop to his enjoying life."

"No; I admit Violet is the only woman to whom I could endure to see him sacrificed. *En même temps*," said De Vigne, with his usual sarcastic fling, which he could no more help than a schoolboy can help shying a stone when he sees a cat, "you know, my dear Arthur, as well as I do, that there is a peculiarly frosty breath in marriage, which chills the sweetest temper, and changes the brightest sunbeams into the hardest icicles!" With which De Vigne sat himself down to *écarté* with Regalia at five guineas a side.

So we talked over Sabretasche and his fiancée, while they, regardless of the babble going on in all the noisy brooks of gossip that brawled and rippled through the many channels of West-end talk, spent, I have no doubt, days that were entered with a mark of purest gold in the cloudless life of each. His old accustomed bay-window saw comparatively little of him; his mornings were given to Violet in the delicious tête-à-tête of her boudoir; in the Ride and the Ring he was by her side or in her carriage; the whist-tables of the United, the guinea points of the Travelers', the coulisses of the Opera, the lansquenet parties at De Vigne's, saw but very little of him; he was waltzing with her at balls, or singing Italian with her after dinner-parties. The Colonel, for the time being, was lost to us and to "life," which he had lived so recklessly and

graced so brilliantly for so many years; and I suppose his new occupation charmed him, for when we did get an hour or two of him, he was certainly more delightful than ever: there was such a joyous ring in his ever-brilliant wit—such gentleness and kindness, to all people and all things, out of the abundance of his own happiness—such a depth of rest and contentment, in lieu of that touching and deep-seated melancholy, which had gone down so far into his character under his gay and fashionable exterior, that it had seemed as if nothing would uproot it. So happily does human life forget its past sorrows in present joy, as the green meadows grow dark or golden, according as the summer sun fades on and off them, that the bitterness so long upon him from his unhappy marriage was entirely dissipated in the beauty of his new existence, and though probably, as time rolled on, the past would occasionally rise up, and the pain of the last twenty years leave a certain sadness upon his character, now, in the fullness of his love and the sweetness of his dawning future, Vivian Sabretasche could from his heart say what *some* men go down from their cradles to their graves without knowing even for an hour or a day—that life had given him perfect and cloudless happiness! It was now the first week of June, the season was at its height, and the 10th of July was fixed for Sabretasche's marriage. He had pressed the Molyneux for a shorter engagement than is usual, and pères et mères show no inclination to procrastinate when men offer such splendid settlements as the Colonel, out of pure lavish love for his young bride, voluntarily proposed! So the marriage-day was fixed, and Sabretasche had bought a villa beside Windermere to enjoy a seclusion such as suited his poet's heart and lover's dreams; he said he had no fancy to spoil his golden days in railway carriages and continental hotels, and the Dilcoosha, perfect already

was being refitted, and having its lilies painted and its gold refined to be worthy to shrine his new and dearest idol. All the prosaic details that attend on love in these days of matter-of-fact and almighty dollars, (how often to tarnish and corrode it!) caught the soft hues of his own poetic and tender nature, and grew in his hands into the generous gifts of love to love, the outward symbols of the inward worship. So surrounded, and with such a future lying before her, in its brilliant colors and seductive witchery, can you not fancy that our ever-radiant belle looked—*how*, words are not warm enough to tell; it would need a brush of power even diviner than Raphael's to picture to you Violet Molyneux's face as it was then, the incarnation of young, shadowless, tender, brilliant, impassioned life! God help us! when the summer day is at its brightest, closest hovers the brooding storm!

The Derby fell late that year. The day was a brilliant, sunshiny one, as it ought to be, for it is the sole day in our existence when we are excited, and do not, as usual, think it necessary to be bored to death to save our characters. We confess to a wild anxiety at the magic word "Start!" to which no other sight on earth could rouse us. We watch with thrilling eagerness the horses rounding the corner as we should watch the beauty of no Galatea, however irresistible, and we see the favorite win the distance with enthusiastic joy, to which all the other excitements upon earth could never fire our blood. From my earliest recollection since I rode races with the stable-boys at five years old, and was discovered indulging in that reprehensible pastime by my tutor, (a mild and inoffensive Ch. Ch. man, to whom *Bell's Life* was a dead letter, and the chariot-racing at Rome and Elis the only painful reading in the classics,) my passion has been for the Turf. No sight is to me more delightful than all those thorough-breds at the Warren, with their

body-clothing off, and their firm, slender limbs uncovered ; no moment dearer than when the favorite, bearing the hopes and the fears of thousands, skimming the earth like a swallow in its flight, pulls up at the distance, with the ruck straggling behind him, while myriad shouts from the stands and the ropes proclaim him winner of the Derby. The Turf!—there must needs be some strange attraction in our English sport—it has lovers more faithful than women ever win ; it has victims, voluntary holocausts upon its altars, more numerous than any creed that ever brought men to martyrdom ; its iron chains are hugged where other silken fetters have grown wearisome ; its fascination lasts, while the taste of the wine may pall and the beauty of feminine grace may satiate. Men are constant to its mystic charms where they tire of love's beguilements ; they give with a lavish hand to it what they would deny to any living thing. Olden chivalry, modern ambition, boast no disciples so faithful as the followers of the Turf, and to the Turf men yield up what women whom they love would ask in vain : lands, fortune, years, energies, powers—till their mistress has beggared them of all, even too often robbed them of honor itself !

To the Derby, of course, we went—Curly, I, and some other men, in De Vigne's drag, lunched off Rhenish, and Guinness, and Moët, and all the delicacies Fortnum and Mason ever packed in a hamper for Epsom ; and drove back to mess along the crowded road. Dropping the others en route, De Vigne drove me on to dine with him at his own house in Grosvenor Place.

“Come into my room first, old fellow,” he said, as we passed up the stairs. “I bought my wedding-presents for Sabretasche and his wife that will be, yesterday, and I want to show them to you. Halloa ! what the deuce is that fellow Raymond doing ?—reading my letters, as I live ! I think I am fated to come across rascals ! How

ever, as they make up nine-tenths of the world, I suppose I can't be surprised at the constant rencontres!"

From the top of the staircase we saw, though at some distance, straight through into De Vigne's bed-room, the door of which stood open. At the writing-table in the center sat his head valet, Raymond, so earnestly reading some of the letters upon it, that he never heard or saw us. De Vigne sometimes wrote his letters in his bed-room; he always read those by the first post over his matutinal coffee; and as he was immeasurably careless both with his papers and his money, his servants had always full opportunity to peruse the one and take the other. If he had seen the man taking ten pounds off his dressing-table, he would have had a fling at human nature, thought it was the way of that class of people, and kept the man on, because he was a useful servant, and no more of a thief, probably, than another would be. But—no matter in what rank—a dishonorable or a sneaky thing, a breach of trust in any way, always irritated him beyond conception; he had been betrayed in greater or minor things so often, and treachery was so utterly foreign to his own frank and impetuous nature, that his impatience at it was very pardonable. I could see his ominous eyebrows contract; he went up, stretched his hand over the man's shoulder, and took the letter quietly out of his grasp.

"Go to Mills for your next month's wages, and leave this evening."

Raymond, sleek, and smooth, and impenetrable as he was, started violently, and changed color; but his answer was very ready.

"Why, Major? I was merely sorting your papers, sir. You have often ordered me to do that."

"No lies—leave the room!" said his master, briefly, as he turned to me. "Arthur, here are the things I mentioned. Come and look at them."

His valet did not obey his order; he still lingered. He began again, in his soft, purring tone:

"You wouldn't dismiss me like this, Major, if you knew what I could tell you."

"Leave the room, and send Robert to me," said De Vigne, with that stern hauteur that always came up when people teased him. He had had his own way from his infancy, and was totally unaccustomed to being crossed. It is bad training for the world for a man to have been obeyed from his cradle.

"You would give me a good deal, Major, to know what I know. I have a secret in my keeping, sir, that you would pay me handsomely to learn——"

"Silence—and leave the room!" reiterated De Vigne, with an impatient stamp of his foot.

Raymond bowed, with a grace becoming a groom of the chambers.

"Certainly, sir. I hope you will pardon me for having troubled you."

Wherewith he backed out with all the sang-froid imaginable, and De Vigne turned to me:

"Cool fellow, isn't he?"

"Yes; but you might as well have heard what he had to say."

"My dear fellow, why?" cried De Vigne, with his most grandiose and contemptuous smile. "What could that man possibly know that could concern me? It was only a ruse to get money out of me, or twist his low-bred curiosity in spying over my letters into a matter of moment. I was especially annoyed at it, because the letter he was reading is a note from Alma: nothing in it—merely to answer a question I asked her about one of her pictures; but you know the child has an enthusiastic way of expressing herself at all times—means nothing, but sounds a great deal

and the 'Dear Sir Folko,' and 'your ever-grateful Little Alma,' and all the rest of it—the days are so long when I don't go to see her, and she envies the women who are in my set and always with me—and all that—reads rather *I* know how she means it, but a common man like Raymond will put a very different significance upon it."

"Most probably *I* know how she means it too; still, you know the old saying, De Vigne, relative to toying with edged tools?"

"No, I don't," said De Vigne, curtly; "or at least I should say I know edged tools, when I see them, as well as you do, and am old enough, if I did come across them, not to cut myself with them. *I* can't think what has possessed Sabretasche and you to try and sermonize to me! Heaven knows you need to lecture yourselves, both of you. I don't stand it very well from *him*; but I'll be shot if I do from you, you young dog, whom I patronized in jackets at Frestonhills! Get out with you, and let Robert take the Derby dust off you in the blue-room."

And he threw Alma's note into a private drawer (to be kept, I wonder?) and pushed me out by the shoulders.

No Cup day ever was so ill-bred as to send dusky English rain-drops on the exquisite toilettes that grace the most aristocratic race in the universe, and we had "Queen's weather" for Ascot. We had all betted on La Violette, the Colonel's beautiful chestnut, who was the favorite in the betting-rooms at Tattersall's as well, and as Tom Severn said, he didn't know which looked the loveliest in its own way, La Violette with her wild eye, her graceful symmetrical limbs, and her coat like silk, or Violet herself, with her Paris toilette, her brilliant beauty, and her joyous unrestrained animation of speech and of regard. La Violette won the Ascot Cup, distancing all the rest of the first flight at an easy swinging gallop, without any apparent

effort; and when we had seen the race fairly run, we went up to the Molyneux carriage to congratulate the Colonel on his chestnut's triumph: Sabretasche being missed from his usual circle of titled betting-men and great turfites, and, for the first time in all his life, watching Ascot run, with his attention more given to the face beside him than the course before.

"I knew we should win!" cried Violet, with the greatest delight in her namesake's triumph. "Did not I tell you so, Major De Vigne?"

"You did, fair prophetess; and if you will always honor me with your clairvoyant instructions, I will always make up my books accordingly."

"The number of bets I have made to-day is something frightful," answered Violet. "If that darling horse had failed me I should have been utterly ruined in gloves."

"As it is, you will have bracelets and *négligés* enough to fill Hunt and Roskell's. You are most dangerous to approach, Miss Molyneux, in more ways than one," said Vane Castleton, who was leaning against the carriage door flirting with her mother.

"Oh! pray don't, Lord Vane; you talk as if I were some grim and terrible Thalestris!" cried Violet, with contemptuous impatience, looking at Sabretasche with a laugh.

It was pretty to see how, in the midst of her laughter, and chat, and merriment with other men, she turned to him every minute, to meet the gaze of eyes which very rarely left their study of her face. They were both at once too delicate and too high-bred to bring any show or demonstration of their attachment abroad in society; still the brightness of her regard when it turned on him, the softness of his voice when he addressed her, were silent evidences enough of the sympathy between them.

"Thalestris!" repeated Sabretasche, smiling. "You

have but very little of the Amazone about you; not enough, perhaps, if your lines had fallen in hard places."

"Instead of rose-leaves! Yet I think I can fight my own battles?"

"Oh yes!" laughed Sabretasche. "I never meant to hint but what you had, in very great perfection, that prerogative par excellence of woman, that Damascus blade—whose brilliant chasing makes us treat it as a toy, until the point has wounded us—the tongue!"

"If mine is a Damascus blade, yours is an Excalibur itself!" cried Violet, with her air moqueur. "Le fourgon se moque de la pelle, monsieur!"

"An English inelegance taking refuge in a foreign idiom. What true feminine diplomacy!" laughed Sabretasche, resting his eyes on her with that deep tenderness for her, for all she did, and said, and thought, which had grown into his life for Violet Molyneux.

She laughed too—that sweet, gay laugh of perfect happiness. There are times when a simple word will woo us easily to laughter, there are others when all the wit in Europe fails to rouse a heart-felt smile.

"Ah! there is her Majesty going off the stand—before Queen Violet goes, too!" she went on. "Do tell me what I had to ask Major De Vigne. I know it was something very important, but I cannot remember, by any exertion of memory, whatever it could be."

"What a happy thing for you that I can remember your affairs as well as my own," smiled Sabretasche. "You wanted to ask him about Miss Tressillian, did you not?"

"Oh yes! Thank you so much. Colonel Sabretasche tells me, Major De Vigne, that you know the artist of that lovely 'Louis Dix-sept,' and that she is a young lady living at Richmond. May I go and see her?"

"Certainly, if you will be so kind."

De Vigne felt a certain annoyance; why, I doubt if he could have told—a certain selfish desire to keep his little flower blooming unseen, save by his own eyes, acting unconsciously upon him.

“The kindness will be to me. Is she young?”

“Yes.”

“How young?”

“Eighteen or nineteen, I believe.”

“And very pretty?”

“Really I cannot say; ladies’ tastes differ from ours on such points.”

“I hope she is,” said Violet, plaintively. “I never did like plain people, never could! I dare say it is very wrong, but I think one likes a handsome face as naturally as one prefers a lily to a dandelion; and I am quite certain the artist of that sketch *must* be pretty.—she could not help it.”

“She is pretty,” said Sabretasche; “at least attractive—what you will call so.”

“Then will you take me to see her to-morrow, Major De Vigne, and introduce us? Of course you will; no one refuses me anything! You can come with me, can you not, Vivian? We will all ride down there before luncheon, for once in awhile, shall we?”

“Yes, and lunch at the Dilcoosha, if Lady Molyneux permits?”

“Go where? Do what?” asked the Viscountess, languidly, turning reluctantly from her, I presume, interesting conversation with Vane Castleton.

Sabretasche repeated his question.

“To see an artist, and lunch with you? Oh yes, I shall be very happy. I don’t think we have any engagements for to-morrow morning,” said Lady Molyneux, turning again to Castleton. “Are you going to the Lumleys to-night, Vane?”

The morning after, half a dozen of us rode down out of Lowndes Square. First, the Colonel and his young fiancée; next, the Viscountess and her pet, Vane Castleton; then De Vigne and I—De Vigne I must confess, in one of his haughtiest, most reserved, and most impatient moods, annoyed, more than he knew, at having to take people to see Alma, whom he had had to himself so long that he seemed to consider any other visit to her as an invasion on his own “vested interests,” and besides, he was irritated to be tricked into taking Vane Castleton there, of all men in the world. But Lady Molyneux had asked him; De Vigne knew nothing of his addition to the party until he had reached Lowndes Square, and to make any comment on, or opposition to it, would have been as useless as unwise. The Colonel and Violet led the way. Sabretasche rode with the skill and speed of an Arab; and she never looked to better advantage than en Amazone; she rode, too, with admirable fearlessness and grace, and her dark tight riding-jacket, with its little gold agraffes, and her black felt hat, with its long soft plumes nestling among her bright chestnut hair, showed to full beauty the perfect contour of her slight form, and the aristocratic and delicate loveliness of her face. I could not wonder at Sabretasche’s pride in, and tenderness over her, as she turned round her horse’s head as they drew near St. Crucis, her eyes gleaming and her cheeks a little flushed, and waited till we came up to them.

“Are we near the house, Major De Vigne?”

“Within a stone’s-throw.”

“And does Miss Tressillian live there all alone?”

“No. The house is kept by an old nurse of hers.”

“An old nurse? Poor girl, how lonely she must be! I am very sorry for her.” And Violet contrasted her own perfect joy and golden future with Alma Tressillian’s

desolate solitude, and confided it to Sabretasche as they cantered on again together.

"I am too happy, Vivian!" she cried, passionately. "Sometimes I lie awake at night, thinking of you, till I grow dizzy with my own delirious joy. What have I done to merit *it*—or *you*? Sometimes I almost tremble; I am so afraid it should not last!"

"My darling, I am grieved at that," said Sabretasche, fondly. "I would not have one shadow rest on your life if I could help it. I have had too much shadow on my own not to guard yours from even the most fleeting cloud. The regret and sorrow of twenty years have been banished off my heart in our present joy; no fear or pain must enter yours, so young and bright. While we both live, my dearest, our happiness *must* last. Very soon, no power on earth can separate us, and we shall never part even for an hour—a moment. Very soon our lives will be as one, Violet—our happiness *must* last!"

"Does Miss Tressillian live alone with an old nurse, Major De Vigne?" Lady Molyneux was asking, in that voice which was languor and superciliousness embodied. "How very queer—so young a girl! To be sure, she is only an artist! Artists *are* queer people, generally. Still, it is very odd!"

"Artists, like other people, must live; and if they have happened to have lost their parents, they cannot live with them, I presume," responded De Vigne, dryly. The Viscountess had always an irritating effect upon his nerves.

"No, of course not; still, there are plenty of places where a girl can take refuge that are most irreproachable—a school, for instance. She would be much better, I should fancy, as a teacher, or a ——"

"She happens to be a lady," interrupted De Vigne.

quietly, "and nurtured in as much luxury and refinement as your daughter."

"Indeed!" said the Viscountess, with a nasty sneer and upraised eyebrows. "Pray, is she quite a—quite a *proper* person for Violet to visit?"

De Vigne's slumbering wrath roused up; every vein glowed with righteous anger and scorn for the pharisaic peeress, of whose own undercurrents he knew a story or two not quite so spotless as might have been, and he looked down at her steadily and contemptuously.

"Lady Molyneux, if the ladies your daughter meets in our set at court and drawing-rooms, balls and operas,—if they, the immaculate Cordelias and Lucretias of English matronage, could lay claim to half as pure a life, and half as pure a heart, as the young girl you are so ready to suspect and to condemn, it might be better for them and—for their husbands!"

It was a more outspoken, and, in this case, more personal, speech than is customary to the bland reserve and reticence customary in "good society," where we may sin, but may not say we do, and where it is only permitted to ridicule or blackguard our friends behind their backs. The Viscountess reddened under her delicate rouge, and turned with a laugh to Vane Castleton. The white gate and dark thatched gables of St. Crucis Farm were now close at hand, and De Vigne rode forward.

"What a picturesque place!" cried Violet, dropping her reins on her mare's neck. "Oh, Vivian, do look at those little lovely yellow chickens, and that great China rose climbing all over the house with the honey-suckle, and veritable lattice windows, and that splendid black cat in the sunshine! Wouldn't you like to live here?"

Sabretasche shook his head, and would have crossed himself had he been a Catholic:

"My dear Violet! Heaven forefend! I cannot say I should."

"Nor she either," laughed De Vigne. "She will be much more in her element in its neighbor, your luxurious Dilcoosha."

Sabretasche smiled, Violet's delicate color deepened, to vie with the China roses she admired, while the Colonel lifted her from her saddle close to the objects of her attachment, the little lovely yellow chickens, certainly the prettiest of all new-born things, humiliatingly pretty beside the rough ugliness of new-born man, who piques himself on being lord of all created creatures; God knows why, except that he is slowest in development and quickest in evil!

Certainly the old farm-house looked its best that day; the gray stone, the black wooden porch, the dark thatch, with its somber lichens, that had all appeared so dark and dreary in the dim February light in which we first saw them, were only antiquated and picturesque in the full glow of the June sunlight. The deep cool shadows of the two great chestnut-trees beside it, with their large leaves and snowy pyramidal blossoms, the warm colors of the China roses and the honey-suckles against its walls, of the full-blossomed apple-trees, and the fragrant lilacs—those delicate perfumy boughs that Horace Walpole, the man of wit and gossip, courts and salons, patches and powder, still found time to love—gave it the picturesqueness and brightness which charmed Violet at first sight; for not more different is the view of human life in youth and age than the view of the same place in summer and winter. If our life were but all youth! if our year were but all summer!

Out of the wide, low lattice window of her own room, half shadowed by the great branches of the chestnut-trees,

with their mélange of green and white, yet with the full glow of the golden morning sunbeams, and the rose-hued reflex of the China roses upon her, Little Alma was leaning as we alighted. Like her home, she chanced to look her prettiest and most picturesque that day, (she was journalière—expressive faces that chiefly depend upon animation and refined intelligence always are;) she was dressed in what Boughton Tressillian had always liked best to see her, what she had worn in the hot season at Lorave, and still wore in the warm weather here, in something very white and gossamer-like, with blue ribbon round her waist, while her golden hair, without anything on it, or any perceivable means of holding it up, made a sunny framework for her face. She was a pretty picture shrined in the dark chestnut-boughs and the glowing flowers—a picture which we could see, though she could not see us.

“Is that Alma Tressillian? How lovely she is!” cried Violet, enthusiastically.

Sabretasche, thinking of her alone, smiled at her ecstasies. The Viscountess raised her glass with supercilious and hypercritic curiosity. Vane Castleton did the same, with the look in his eyes that he had given the night before to the very superior ankles of a new danseuse. De Vigne caught the look—by George! how his eyes flashed—and he led the way into the house, sorely wrathful within him. Alma’s innate high breeding never showed itself more than now when she received her unexpected influx of visitors. The girl had seen no society, had never been “finished,” nor taught to “give a reception;” yet her inborn self-possession and tact never deserted her, and if she had been brought up all her days in the salons of the Tuileries or St. James, it would have been impossible to show more calm and winning grace than she did at this sudden inroad on the conventual solitude of her studio. Violet and she

fraternized immediately; it was no visit from a fashionable beauty to a friendless artist, for Violet was infinitely too much of a lady not to recognize the intuitive aristocracy which in the Little Tressillian was so thoroughly stamped in blood and feature, manner and mind, and would have survived all adventitious circumstances or surroundings. There was a certain resemblance which we had often noticed between them in their natures, their vivacity, their perfect freedom from all affectations. Violet's manner, when she chose, was soft and sweet enough to have melted the Medusa into amiability; Alma's vivacity and that sense of power, strong as it is modest, which the sense of genius always confers, especially where, as in her case, it is backed by talent of a high order in many other things, prevented her ever knowing such a thing as shyness, and (now that she had been relieved of all jealousy of her by De Vigne's information that Violet was engaged to the Colonel) she had returned to her old admiration and inclination for the brilliant belle who had picked up her sketches on the pavé of Pall Mall.

The Viscountess sat down on a low chair in a state of supercilious apathy. She cared nothing for pictures. The parrot's talk, which was certainly very voluble, made her head ache, and Vane Castleton was infinitely too full of admiration of Alma to please her ladyship. De Vigne, when he had done the introductory part of the action, played with Sylvio, only looking up when Alma addressed him, and then answering her more distantly and briefly than his wont. He could have shot Castleton with great pleasure for the free glance of his bold light eyes, and such a murderous frame of mind rather spoils a man for society, however great he may generally be as a conversationalist!

We, however, managed to keep up the ball of talk very gayly, even without him. It was chiefly, of course, upon

art—turning on Alma's pictures, which drew warm praises from Violet and Castleton, and, what was much more, from that most fastidious critic and connoisseur, the Colonel, partly, I dare say, to please his fiancée, but partly because they really were wonderfully clever, and he thought them so. We were in no hurry to leave. Castleton evidently thought the chevelure dorée charming; women were all of one class to him—all to be bought; some with higher prices and some with lower, and he drew no distinction between them, except that some were blondes and some brunes. Violet seemed to like leaning against the old oak window-seat scenting the roses, chatting with Alma, and listening to Sabretasche's classic and charming disquisitions upon art, and Alma herself was in her element with these highly bred and highly-educated people. We were in no hurry to go; but Lady Molyneux was, and was much too bored to stay there long.

"You will come and see me?" said her daughter, holding out her hand to Alma. "Oh yes, you must. Mamma, is not Thursday our next soirée? Miss Tressillian would like to meet some of those célèbres, I am sure; and they would like to see her, for every one has admired her 'Louis Dix-sept' so much. Have you any engagement?"

Of course Alma had none. She gave a glance at De Vigne, to see if he wished her to go, but as he was absorbed in teaching Sylvio to sit on his hind legs and hold his riding-whip on his nose, she found no responsive glance, and had to accept it without consulting him. Violet taking acceptance for granted, and her mamma, who did not care to contradict her before Sabretasche, and intended to reprimand her in private for her ridiculous folly in taking up this little orphan, joining languidly in the invitation, the Little Tressillian stood booked for the Thursday soirée in Lowndes Square.

Violet bade her good-by with that suave warmth which fashionable life could never ice out of her, and the Viscountess swept out of the room, and down the garden, in no very amiable frame of mind. She rather affected patronizing artistes of all kinds, and had brought out several protégés, though she unhappily had dropped them as soon as their novelty had worn off; but to patronize an artiste of nineteen, whose face Vane Castleton admired, was a very different matter, for my lady was just now as much in love as she had ever been in love with anything, except herself, and there is no passion more exigent and tenacious than the fancy of a woman *passée* herself for a young and handsome man! De Vigne was a little behind the rest as he left the room, and Alma called him back, her face full of the delight that Violet's invitation had given her.

"Oh, Sir Folko! I am so happy. I shall be in your set at last. Was it not kind of Miss Molyneux?"

"Very kind indeed."

"Don't you like me to go?"

"I? What have I to do with it? On the contrary, I think you will enjoy yourself very much."

"You will be there, of course?"

"I don't know. Perhaps."

"Oh, you will," cried Alma, plaintively. "You would not spoil all my pleasure, surely? I do so long to see you in your own society. Only mind you don't talk to any one so much as you do to me!"

"Nonsense!" said De Vigne, half laughing *malgré lui*. "Good-by, petite, I must go."

"But why have you spoken so little to me this morning?" persisted Alma.

"You have had plenty of others to talk to you," said De Vigne, coldly. "At least, you have seemed very well amused."

"Sir Folko, that is very cruel," cried Alma, vehemently. "You know, as well as I can tell you, that if you are not kind to me, all the world can give me no pleasure. You know that there is no one I care to talk to compared with you."

"Nonsense! Good-by, petite," said De Vigne, hastily, but kindly, for his momentary irritation had passed, as he swung through the garden and threw himself across his horse.

"What a little darling she is, Vivian!" said Violet, as they cantered along the road. "Don't you think so?"

Sabretasche laughed.

"Really, my pet, I did not notice her very much. There is but one 'darling' for me now."

"Deuced nice little thing that!" said Castleton to me; "uncommonly pretty feet she has; I caught sight of one of them. I suppose she's De Vigne's game, bagged already, probably, else, on my honor, I shouldn't mind de-throning Coralie and promoting her. French women have such deuced extravagant ideas."

I believe if De Vigne had heard him he would have knocked Castleton straight off his horse. His cool way of disposing of Alma irritated even *me* a little, and I told him, a trifle sharply, that I thought he had better call on his "honor" to remember that Miss Tressillian was a lady by birth and by education, and that she was hardly to be classed with the Coralies of our acquaintance. To which Castleton responded with a shrug of his shoulders and a twist of his blond whiskers:

"Bless your soul, my dear fellow, women are all alike! Never knew either you or De Vigne scrupulous before;" and rode on with the Viscountess, asking me, with a sneer, if I was "the Major's game-keeper."

De Vigne was very quick to act, but he was unwilling

to analyze. It always fidgeted him to reason on, to dissect, and to investigate his own feelings; he was not cold enough to sit on a court-martial on his own heart, to cut it up and put it in a microscope, like Gosse over a frog or a dianthis, or to imitate De Quincey's raffiné habit of speculating on his own emotions. He was utterly incapable of laying his own feelings before him, as an anatomist lays a human skeleton, counting the bones, and muscles, and points of ossification, it is true, but missing the flesh, the coloring, the quick flow of blood, the warm moving life which gave to that bare skeleton all its glow and beauty. De Vigné acted, and did not stop to ask himself why he did so nine times out of ten; therefore he never inquired, or thought of inquiring, why he had experienced such unnecessary and unreasonable anger at Castleton and Alma, but only felt remorsefully that he had lacked kindness in not sympathizing with the poor child in her very natural delight at her invitation to Lowndes Square. Whenever he thought he had been unkind, if it were to a dog, he was not easy till he had made reparation; and not stopping to remember that unkindness from him might be the greater kindness in the end, he sent her down on Thursday morning as exquisite a bouquet as the pick of Covent Garden could give him, clasped round with two bracelets as delicate in workmanship as they were rare in value, with a line, "Wear them to-night in memory of your grandfather's friendship for 'Sir Folko.'"

Dear old fellow, (true heart and loyal friend; my blood always warms when I think of him or write his name!) Granville De Vigné's warm virtues led him as often into temptation as other men's cold selfishness or vice. When he sent that bouquet with his bracelets to the Little Tressillian, despite his passionate nature and his wild life, I am certain he had no deeper motive, no other thought.

than to make reparation for his unkindness, and to give her as delicately as he could ornaments he knew that she must need. With him no error was fore-planned and pre-meditated. He might have slain you in a passion perhaps, but he could never have stilettoed you in cold blood. There was not a taint of malice or design, not a trace of the "serpent nature" in his sweet and generous, frank and placable, though fiery and impatient character. My Orestes has always been very dear to me since the first day I saw our senior pupil at Frestonhills. God bless him! There must be great good in a man, even though the world ostracized and damned him ever so determinedly, who could make another man love him so truly and so well.



PART THE FIFTEENTH.

I.

HOW THE OLDEN DELIRIUM AWOKE LIKE A GIANT FROM
HIS SLUMBERS.

THE Molyneux rooms in Lowndes Square were full; not crowded, the Viscountess knew too well the art of society to cram her apartments, as is the present habitude, till lords and ladies jostle and crush one another like so many Johns and Marys crowding before a fair—the rooms were full, and "brilliantly attended," as the morning papers had it next day, for though they were of the fourth order of nobility, the Molyneux had as exclusive a set as any in town, and knew "everybody." "Everybody!" Comprehensive phrase! meaning, in *their* lips, just the *creme de la creme* and nothing whatever below it; mean-

ing, in a Warden's, all his Chapter; in a school-girl's, all her school-fellows; in a leg's, all the "ossy-men;" in an author's, those who read him; in a painter's, those who praise him; in a rector's, those who testimonialize and saint him! In addition to the haute volée of fashion there was the haute volée of intellect at the Viscountess's soirée, for Lady Molyneux dearly loved to have a lion, (though whether a writer who honors the nations, or an Eastern prince in native ugliness and jewelry, was perhaps immaterial to her!) and many of our best *littérateurs* and artists were not only acquaintances of hers, but intimate friends of Sabretasche's, who at any time threw over the most aristocratic crush for the simplest intellectual réunion, preferring, as he used to say, the God-given cordon of Brain to the ribbons of Bath or Garter.

The rooms were full, the guests brilliant and well assorted; there were Garcia, and Grisi, and Gardoni in the music-room; there was dancing in the ball-room for inveterate waltzers like Curly or Violet; and in the drawing-rooms there was, rarest of all—though good singing and good waltzing are rare enough, in all conscience, Heaven knows!—there was good conversation, conversation worthy the name, with (*mirabile dictu!* in these days of didactic commonplace, and wit, God save the mark! heavy as a Suffolk cart-horse) repartee and discussion that would not have disgraced the charming evenings at Madame de Sablé's, or the circles at Strawberry Hill and Holland House.

I went there early, leaving a dinner-party in Eaton Square sooner than perhaps I should have done, from a trifle of curiosity I felt to see how the "Little Tressillian" comported herself in her new sphere; and I confess I did not expect to see her quite so thoroughly at home, and quite so much of a star in her own way as I found her to be.

I have told you she had nothing of Violet's regular and perfect beauty—regular as a classic statue, perfect as an exquisitely-tinted picture—yet, somehow or other, Alma *told* as well in her way as the lovely Irish belle in hers; told even better than the Lady Ela Ashburnington, our modern Medici Venus—but who, alas! like the Venus, never opens those perfectly-chiseled lips; or the exquisite Mrs. Tite Delafield,—whose form would rival Canova's Pauline, if it weren't made by her *couturière*; or even Madame la Duchesse de la Vieillecour, now that—ah me!—the sweet rose bloom is due to Palais Royal shops, and the once innocent lips only breathe coquetries studied beforehand, while her maid brushes out her long hair, and Gwen—pshaw! Madame la Duchesse—glances alternately from the Lys de la Vallée to her *miroir face et nuque*.

Yes, Alma won upon all; whether it was her freshness, whether it was her natural abandon, whether it was her unusual talent, wit, and gay self-possession, (for if there is a being on earth whom I hate 'tis Byron's "bread-and-butter miss,") I must leave. Probably, it was that nameless something which one would think Mephistopheles himself had given some women, so surely and so unreasoningly do we go down before it, whether we will or no. The women sneered at her, and smiled superciliously, but that was of course! See two pretty women look at each other—there is defiance in the mutual regard, and each thinks in her own heart, "*Je vais me frotter contre Wellington!*" One might have imagined that those high-bred beauties, with their style and their Paris dress, their acknowledged beauty, and their assured conquests, could well have spared poor little Alma a few of the leaves out of their weighty bay wreaths. Yet I believe in my soul they grudged her even the stalks, and absolutely condescended to honor her with a sneer (surest sign of feminine envy) when they saw

not only a leaf or two, but a good many garlands of rose and myrtle going to her in the Olympian game of "Shining." Violet, the only woman I ever knew without a trace of envy or spite, occupied though she pardonably was with her own happiness, had taken care to circulate Alma's identity with the artist of the "Louis Dix-sept;" she had interested one or two of the Academicians (kind as your really "grands hommes" generally are to tyros) about her, and had introduced to her some of the "nicest men," according to Violet's idea of our niceness, which was, I dare say, according to our capabilities for intellectual conversation. So started, Alma was quite capable of holding her own, and of coming in at the distance with the best of them, and when I entered the ball-room I saw the little lady leaning on Curly's arm, after a galope with him, laughing and talking with him and half a dozen men—among them Castleton. Her own innate good taste had led her to dress solely in white, with a few white flowers and dark myrtle leaves laid on her golden hair; De Vigne's emeralds, flashing in the gas-lights, her sole ornaments. There was something uncommonly picturesque in her appearance; rooms filled like the Molyneux' were no slight test; but her extreme animation of feature, vivacity of manner, and ready wit—always to the point, but always spoken softly, merrily, laughingly, as if even the keen satire the Little Tressillian could on occasion deal out only came from the superabundance of her quick intelligence and joyous spirits—attracted all the men round her, if only in surprise at a new study, and gratitude to that "deuced amusing little thing" for a fresh sensation.

Alma, like all brilliant and lively women, enjoyed shining, and scintillating, and winning the admiration she was born to create. I would as soon, *entre nous*, believe in a child not liking bonbons, or in a jockey not caring to win

the Goodwood Cup, as I would believe in a woman not liking admiration—if she can get it! Perhaps but for her whole-hearted admiration for De Vigne, after whose epigrammatic talk and original character all men seemed very naturally to her *fade*, spiritless, and commonplace, Alma might have been a coquette—if you can fence well it were hard to hang up the foils all your days!

I could not say Alma was the belle of the rooms, because Violet Molyneux was that wherever she went; and had Violet been absent, Lady Ela, and Mrs. Tite, and Madame de la Vieillecour, aforesaid, must in justice have won the golden apple long before her—those three superb and royal beauties, with their pearls and their diamonds, their dentelle and their demi-trains, their usage du monde and their skillful flirtations; but Alma had more men round her than any other, I can assure you—Violet, to a certain extent, being tacitly left to the Colonel. An R. A. complimented Alma on her wonderful talent, a cabinet minister smiled at her repartee, a great *littérateur* exchanged mots with her, Curly fell more deeply in love with her than ever, Castleton was rapturous about her feet and ankles, very blasé men about town went the length of exciting themselves to ask her to dance, and Guardsmen warmed into stronger admiration than their customary *nil admirari*-ism usually permitted, about her. Yet she bent forward to me, as I approached her, with a very eager whisper:

“On, Captain Chevasney! isn’t Sir Folko—Major De Vigne—coming?”

I really couldn’t tell her, as I had not seen him all day, save for a few minutes in Pall Mall; and the dreadful disappointment on her face was exceedingly amusing. But a minute afterward her eyes flashed, the color deepened in her cheeks.

“There he is!” she said, with an under-breath of delight

And her attention to Curly, and Castleton, and the other men, began to wander considerably.

There he was, leaning against the doorway, distinguishable from all around him by the stately set of his head and the "grand air" for which he had always been remarkable, even from his boyish days at Frestonhills. He looked bored, I was going to say, but that is rather too affected a thing, and not earnest nor ardent enough for any feeling of De Vigne's; it was rather the look of a man too impatient and too spirited for the quiet trivialities around him, who would prefer "fierce love and faithless war" to drawing-room flirtations and polite character—damning; the look of a horse who wants to be scenting powder and leading a charge, and is ridden quietly along smooth downs where nothing is stirring, with a curb which he does not relish. Ostensibly, he was chatting with a member of the Lower House; absolutely, he was watching Alma with that dark haughty look in his eyes, caused, I think, by a certain peculiarity of dropping the lashes half over them when he was angry, which made me fancy he was not over-pleased to see the men crowding round the little lady.

"He won't come and speak to me. Do go and ask him to come, Captain Chevasney!" whispered Alma, confidentially, to me.

I laughed—he had not been more than three minutes in the room!—and obeyed her behest.

"Your little friend wants you to go and talk to her, De Vigne."

He glanced toward her:

"She is quite as well without any attention from me, considering the reports that have already risen concerning us, and she seems admirably amused as it is."

"Halloa! are we jealous?"

"Jealous! Of what, pray?" asked my lord with supreme scorn.

And moving across the room at once in Alma's direction, (without thinking of it, I had suggested the very thing to send him to her, wayward fellow as he was, in sheer defiance,) he joined the group gathered round the attractive Little Tressillian, whose radiant smile at his approach made Castleton sneer, and poor Curly swear *sotto voce* under his silky blonde moustache. De Vigne, however, did not say much to her; he shook hands with her, said one or two things about the célèbres to whom she had been introduced, and talking with Tom Severn (whom Alma's chevelure dorée had attracted to her side) about the pigeon-match at Hornsey Wood that morning, left the little lady so much to the other men, that Alma, though he was within a yard of her, thought she preferred him infinitely more in her studio at St. Crucis than in the crowded salons of that "set" of his in which she had so wished to meet him.

The band began again one of D'Albert's most spirited waltzes, and Tom Severn whirled the Little Tressillian, according to engagement, into the circle, Alma giving De Vigne a very sad, reproachful glance as she went off on Tom's arm. De Vigne did not see it, or would not seem to see it, and leant against a console, talking to Madame de la Vieillecour; Gwen Brandling had loved a waltz as genuinely and gayly as a young débutante could; Madame la Duchesse scarcely thought it stately enough, reserved it only as a most immeasurable favor, and generally preferred refusing some dozen aspirants, and retaining them to flirt with round her sofa. But though he and madame talked very rapidly in French on all sorts of subjects and of numbers of mutual Paris friends, I do not fancy that the Duchess's fine eyes received the attention from him that did Alma's golden-haired head, white cloud-like dress, and

the little feet which had won Castleton's admiration, and which showed to perfection, long though her dress might be, as Severn whirled her round in the delicious, voluptuous, rapid waltz—that natural, entrancing, and Greek-like dance, of which I am not even yet blasé, nor shall be till I have the gout.

De Vigne talked to Madame de la Vieillecour, but he watched the Little Tressillian, who danced as lightly and as gracefully as a Spanish girl or an Eastern bayadère: watched her, the fact dawning on him, with a certain warning thrill, that she was not, after all, a little thing to laugh at, and play with, and pet innocently, as he did his spaniel or his parrot, but a woman impassioned, accomplished, fascinating, as dangerous to men as she was attractive to them, who could no more be trifled with without the trifling falling back again upon the trifler than champagne can be drunk like water, or absinthe taken to excess without harm, or opium eaten long without delirium more or less.

Certain jealousies surged up in his heart, certain embers that had slumbered long began to quicken into flame; the blood that he had tried to chill into ice-water rushed through his veins with something of its natural rapidity and fire. Warnings in plenty were given him that the passion which had before cost him so much was not dead in him, that the intoxication under which he had so often gone down might drown his reason and draw him under its delirious pains and raptures yet again. Good Heavens! could he think that at five-and-thirty his youth was crushed out of him?—could he hope that while life was still so young and feeling strong in him, passion could by any possibility have been dead? Warnings in plenty were given him, but his old impetuosity and impatience made him disdain them; and, indeed, in such things warnings

ever only serve to hasten what they try to avert. He had pooh-poohed Sabretasche's earnest and my half-laughing counsels; he heeded as little what ought to have roused him much more, the throbs of his own heart, and the passions stirring into life within him.

She was a child, he told himself; his own honor was guard enough against love growing up between them. So he would have said if he had ever reasoned on it. But he never, as I have observed, did reason on anything; he was not nearly cold or calculating enough for such self-examination, and even now, though jealousy was waking up in him, he was willfully blind to it and to the irritation which the sight of the other men crowding round and claiming her excited in him.

"Don't you mean to dance with me?" whispered Alma, piteously, as he passed her after the waltz was over.

"I seldom dance," he answered.

It was the truth: waltzing had used to be a passion with him, but since the Trefusis had waltzed his reason away, the dance had brought disagreeable associations with it.

"But you *must* waltz with me!"

"Hush! All the room will hear you," said De Vigne, smiling in spite of himself. "Let me look at your list, then!"

"Oh, I would not make any engagements. I might have been engaged ten deep, Sir Folko, but I kept them all free for you."

"May I have the honor of the next waltz with you, then, Miss Tressillian?" asked De Vigne, in a louder tone, for the benefit of the people round.

Of course he got an eager assent, and, leaving her the center of her little *pro tempo* court, he strolled out of the ball-room, chatted over the Reform Bill with a Right Honorable, who urged him, with all the eloquence of which

he, an accomplished speaker, was master, to stand for his borough in a coming election—an honor De Vigne laughingly repudiated: he would lead a charge, he said, with pleasure, any day, for his country, but he really could not sacrifice himself to wind red tape for the nation. Then he strolled on through the other apartments, saying a few words to his myriad acquaintances, listened with Sabretasche and Violet to a duo of Mario and Grisi's, and went back to the ball-room just in time for Alma's waltz. As he put his arm round her, and whirled her into the circle, he remembered, with a shudder at the memory, that the last woman he had waltzed with was the Trefusis. In India wilder sports and more exciting amusements had filled his time, and since he had been in England he had chiefly frequented men's society.

"You had my note, Sir Folko?" was Alma's first question. "I could never thank you for your beautiful gifts, I could never tell you what happiness they gave me, what I felt when I saw them, how grateful I am for all your kindness, how I prize it, how much I would give to be able to repay it!"

"You have said far more than enough, petite," said De Vigne, hastily.

"No!" persisted Alma, "I could *never* say enough to thank you for all your lavish kindness to me."

"Nonsense," laughed De Vigne. "I have given bracelets to many other women, Alma, but none of them thought they had any need to feel any gratitude to me. The gratitude they thought was due to *them* for having allowed me to offer them the gift!"

He spoke with something of a sneer, from the memory of how—to him, at least—women, high and low, had ever been cheap, and worthless as most cheap things are; and the words cast a chill over his listener. For the first time the serpent entered into Alma's Eden—entered, as in Mil-

ton's apologue, with the first dawning knowledge of passion. Unshed tears sprang into her eyes, making them flash and gleam as brilliantly as the jewels in the ornaments he had given her.

"If you did not give them from kindness," she said, passionately, "take them back. My happiness in them is gone."

"Silly child!" said De Vigne, half smiling at her vehement tones. "Should I have given them to you if I had not cared to do so? On the contrary, I am always glad to give you any pleasure, if I can. But do you suppose, Alma, that I have gone all my life without giving bracelets to any one till I gave them to you?"

Alma laughed, but she looked, half vexed, up in his face even still:

"No, I do not, Sir Folko; but you should not give them to me *as* you gave them to other women, any more than you should class me with other women. You have told me you did not?"

"My dear Alma, I cannot puzzle out all your wonderful distinctions and definitions," interrupted De Vigne, hastily, half laughing himself. "Have you enjoyed the evening as much as you anticipated?"

"Oh, it is delightful!" cried the little lady, with that quick change of tone, the result probably of the combination of vivacity and sensitiveness in her nature which produced her rapid alternation from sorrow to mirth, and her extreme susceptibility to external impressions.

De Vigne raised his eyebrows, and interrupted her again, somewhat unwarrantably:

"You are a finished coquette, Alma."

Her blue eyes opened wide under their black lashes:

"Sir Folko!—I?"

"Yes, you. I am not finding fault with you for it. All

women are who can be. I only wonder where, in your seclusion, you have learned all those pretty wiles and ways that women, versed in society from their childhood, fail to acquire. Who has taught you all those dangerous tricks, from whom have you imitated your skill in captivating Curly and Castleton and Severn, and all those other men, however different their styles or tastes? You are an accomplished flirt, petite, and I congratulate you on your proficiency."

He spoke with most unnecessary bitterness, much more than he was conscious of, and certainly much more than he ought to have used, for the Little Tressillian was just as much of a coquette—if you like to call it so—and no more of one, than De Vigne in reality liked; for he preferred, infinitely, spirited and attractive women, and, indeed, measured women by their power of fascination. But now the devil of jealousy had entered into him unknown to himself, and he spoke to her with a cold satirical hauteur, such as Alma had never had from him.

Her eyes flashed, her lips quivered a little; Alma was not a woman to sit down tranquilly under injustice; her nature was too passionate not to be indignant under accusation, though it was at the same time much too tender not to forgive it as rapidly where she loved the offender.

"For shame, Sir Folko!" she cried, vehemently. Fortunately the band was far too loud for her voice to be heard by the other waltzers, though, as her forehead rested on his shoulder while they waltzed, he could catch every word. "You are cruelly unjust: you know as well as I do that you do not believe what you say, though Heaven knows *why* you say it! I am not aware that I have any 'wiles and ways'—as you so kindly term them—but I do know that no one has 'taught' them to me. What I think I say; what I feel I tell people: if I am happy, I do not

conceal it. I enjoy talking to gentlemen—they are very agreeable and very amusing, and I do not think it necessary to deny it; and I should have trusted you—a man of the world who piques himself upon his keen-sightedness—to have read me aright. ‘Coquette!’ I have heard you use that word to women you despise. Coquette, I have heard you say, means one to whom all men are equal. I thank you greatly for your kind opinion of me!”

“Hush, hush, Alma! Heaven knows that was far from my thoughts! Forgive me, petite; I meant nothing unkind. I know you have no artifices or affectations, and I should never attribute them to you. Let nothing I say vex you. If you knew all the shams and manœuvres I have come across, you would not wonder that I am skeptical and suspicious, and sometimes perhaps unjust.”

He spoke kindly, gently, almost fondly. He was angry with himself for having spoiled her unclouded pleasure. She looked up in his face with a saddened, reproachful tenderness, which had never been in her eyes before, different to their impetuous vexation, different still to their frank, affectionate confidence:

“Yes; but trust *me* at least, Sir Folko, if you doubt all the world?”

“I do!”

He spoke in a low whisper, his moustache touching her golden hair, her heart throbbing against his, her breath upon his cheek, his hand closing tight upon hers in the caress of the waltz, and with the voluptuous swell of the music, the tender and passionate light of the eyes that were lifted to his, for the first time there awoke, and trembled in them both, the dawn of that passion which the one had never before known, which to the other had been so fierce and fatal a curse.

At that moment the music ceased. De Vigne gave her

his arm in silence, and soon after seated himself by her on one of the couches, while other men came round her, taking ices and talking the usual ball-room chit-chat, and the Little Tressillian shone with increased brilliance now that her "Sir Folko" was beside her. It was strange how much that single evening did for Alma: she was admired, courted, followed; she learnt her own power, she received the myrtle crown due to her own attractions; to the grace and talent of Nature she seemed to acquire the grace and talent of Society, and to the charming and winning ways of her girlhood she added the witchery, wit, and fascination of a woman of the world. In that one night she grew tenfold more attractive than before; she was like a bird, who never sings so well till he has tried his wings.

She fascinated unconsciously away De Vigne's reason, prudence, and resolves, as woman's witchery had ever done. Without thinking why or wherefore, she bewitched him; without remembering his sage remark to me, that, "considering the reports already circulated concerning them, she was much better without his attentions," he gave himself up to the influence of the hour. He eclipsed, as he easily could, Curly, Castleton, Tom Severn, and all the other men; he waltzed with her often, he took her into the drawing-room and introduced her to one or two of the most celebrated men present, and talked with her and them animatedly, brilliantly, epigrammatically, with that apropos wit and keen, polished satire in which no one, when he was in good spirits, could ever surpass De Vigne.

I do not believe that around Madame de Deffand's fauteuil, or in the salons of Gore House, could have been heard more sparkling conversation than that which scintillated from the group in Lowndes Square drawing-room, of which Violet, Madame de la Vieillecour, and the Little Tressillian were the center, and round which De Vigne

Sabretasche, and several of the beaux esprits and the esprits forts of our time were gathered. As great a charm as beauty had over his senses, had intellect over De Vigne's mind; he had never rested till he won the one, he would have gone anywhere to find the other. I had always thought that if he were ever won through both, he would never give up the love, cost him what it might. That Alma's talents were now dazzling him, as the Trefusis's exterior charms, and the charms of many others, had done before her, it was easy to see, and there were in his eyes, when they dwelt upon her, the mingled softness and fire which were sure signs of his olden delirium stealing upon him.

Violet had promised, when at St. Crucis, to send their carriage for Alma; but when the time came, her mother had snappishly refused to dispatch her roans out on any such errand, and Violet had had recourse to the Colonel, begging him to lend her one of his carriages, to enable her to keep her promise. Sabretasche, who would have fulfilled, or tried to fulfill, the most impossible desires of his fiancée, of course consented to so trifling a request, and Violet had sent his brougham and her own maid—that most good-natured and charming of soubrettes—Justine, for the Little Tressillian; for Violet had one great merit, if she did a thing at all she did it well; and in all the whirl and gayety of her life she never forgot a promise or neglected a kindness. Sabretasche's brougham was accordingly there to take Alma back to Richmond; and not even Lady Ela, or Mrs. Tite, or Madame la Duchesse, had more men anxious for the pleasure of taking them to their carriages, than the little débutante. Curly's soft glance and words pleaded hard for the distinction; Tom Severn would fain have had it; Castleton tried hard to give her his arm; but De Vigne kept them all off, and took her

down stairs with that tranquil appropriateness which he thought his intimacy with her would warrant. He would not have been best pleased if he had heard the laugh and the remarks that followed them, from the men that were on the staircase watching the women leave. The gas-light shone on her bright dark-blue eyes, as she leaned forward in the carriage, and put out both her hands to him, his emeralds glittering on her white arms, and her face speaking all that was in her heart.

"Sir Folko! if I could but thank you as I feel!"

"If I could but prove to you you have nothing to thank me for! Would to Heaven that you had!"

"At least, I have all the happiness that is in my life."

"Happiness? Hush!" said De Vigne, passionately. "How can you tell but what some day you may hate me, loathe me, and wish to God that we had never met?"

"I?" cried Alma. "O Heaven! no. If I were to die by your hand, I would pray with my latest breath that God might bless you."

"You would? Poor child!" murmured De Vigne. "Alma, good night!"

"Good night!"

Those two good nights were very soft and low—spoken with a more tender intonation than any words that had ever passed between them. His hands closed tightly upon hers; the love of woman, his favorite toy in early youth, the stake on which he risked so much in early manhood, was beguiling him again. His head was bent so that his lips almost touched her wide arched brow; perhaps they might have touched and lingered there—but, "Way for the Duchesse de la Vieillecour's carriage!" was shouted out, the coachman started off his horses, and De Vigne stood still beneath the awning, with the bright gas glare around and the dark street beyond him, while his heart

stirred and his pulses quickened as, since his marriage-day, he had vowed they never should again for any woman's sake.

He walked home alone, without waiting for his carriage, or, indeed, remembering it, smoking his cigar as he paced the gray, deserted streets, forsaken in the early morning dawn save by a policeman here and there, or some wretched women reeling out of a gin-palace, or some groups quitting a casino with riotous but mirthless laughter. He walked home, restless, impatient, ill at ease, with two faces before him haunting him 'as relentlessly as in the phantasmagoria of fever—the faces of Constance Trefusis and Alma Tressillian—the one with her sensual, the other with her intellectual beauty; the one who had destroyed his youth, the other who had given it back to him, side by side in their startling and forcible contrast, as in the Eastern fable the good angel sits on the right shoulder and the bad angel on the left, neither leaving us, each pursuing us throughout the day and night.

Till he reached his home, threw himself on his bed, and took some grains of opium, as he had done in India when sleep forsook him, both those faces haunted his brain—the woman he had made his wife, and the woman who had won his love.

GRANVILLE DE VIGNE

OR

HELD IN BONDAGE.

VOL. II.

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GRANVILLE DE VIGNE.

PART THE SIXTEENTH.

I.

“LES ORAGES SONT ENVIRONNÉS DE BEAUX JOURS.”

THE ball at Lady Molyneux's was on the 25th of June. On the day after, just a fortnight before the 10th, which was fixed as his marriage-day, Sabretasche gave a fête at his Dilcoosha. That exquisite place, which had always reminded me of Vathek and of Fonthill, was ten thousand times more exquisite now. Little as I notice detail where I admire the tout ensemble, and intolerable as I consider the fashion of lingering over the modern upholstery in a novel, and interspersing the description of Adeliza's or Fitzallan's harrowing sufferings with that of her Sèvres and silver cafetière, or his velvet and gold smoking-cap, I must admit that the Dilcoosha was perfect, and I do not think Aladdin himself could have improvised a more lovely cage for his pet bird than the Colonel had done for his. It had been a whim of his to embellish that house in every possible way before his engagement; but after it, he seemed to take a perfect delight in making Violet's home as luxurious and as beautiful as his wealth, and his art, and his own love of everything graceful and refined could com-

bine to render it. I went over it with him one day, and I told him that if ever I wanted to do up old Longholme as lavishly, I hoped he would come and act as superintendent of the works. Certainly, if Violet had married the highest peer in the realm, she could not have had a more lovely shrine than the Dilcoosha. Regalia's grim and grand old castle in Merionetshire would have looked very dull and dark after Sabretasche's villa, where everything was perfect. The grounds were as wild and luxuriant as any woodland in the heart of the provinces, while yet all the resources of horticulture were lavished on them, and their cascades and fountains rivaled Chatsworth. The conservatories excelled even Leila Puffdoff's winter-garden, with here and there among their glories of blossom and coloring a marble group or a single statuette, such as the rifling of Parisian, and Florentine, and Roman studios could give him. The suite of drawing-rooms opened out of them, a soft demi-lumière streaming through rose-hued glass on the thousand gems of art, the low couches, the buhl cabinets, mosaic tables, delicate books, statuettes, flowers, Dresden figures, that were gathered in them; the walls were hung with white watered silk, looped up here and there to show little oval landscapes by some of the first French masters, and parted at regular distances for mirrors, that reflected the exotics that clustered at their feet. Violet's morning room, (I hate the word "boudoir;" stock-brokers' Hackney or Peckham villas boast their "boudoirs," and tradesmen's wives sit puffing under finery in "boudoirs," while their lords take invoices in white aprons, or advertise their "Nonpareil trousers," their genuine Glenlivat, or *ne plus ultra* coats!)—Violet's morning room was hung in pale green and gold, with a choice library of her favorite works collected in quaint mediæval book-stands, the deep bay-window opening on to the

loveliest view the grounds afforded, the walls painted in illustration of Lallah Rookh, and the greatest gems the house contained in sculpture or in art shrined here in her honor—a room in which, looking out to the fair landscape beyond, and back to the rich treasures of art within, one fondly felt

To sit in sunshine calm and sweet,
It were a world too exquisite
For man to leave it for the gloom,
The cold dark shadow of the tomb!

Her bed-room and her dressing-room rivaled Lady Blessington's, and Sabretasche needed all his great wealth to adorn them as he did. The bed was of carved ivory, the curtains of pink silk and white lace, caught up by a chain of flowers, moulded and chased in silver; all the hangings of the rooms were pink and silver, while silver lamps swung from the ceiling, giving out perfume as they burned. It was a home fit for an imperial bride, and though a still fairer shrine, and for a purer deity, made me think of Du Barry's Luciennes, where the "very locks of the doors were works of art and chefs-d'œuvre of taste." Sabretasche had such pleasure in beautifying it, for his habitual love of art and refinement was in it, blent with his tender love for Violet Molyneux, and, if ever a man's or woman's idol was worthy of the shrine made for them, she merited his lavish gifts.

On the 26th, Sabretasche had a fête at the Dilcoosha, a day to be spent, according to Violet's programme, so that, as she said, "she might catch a glimpse of the Summer, and forget the Season for an hour or two;" and as the Colonel's Dilcoosha was known to afford, if anything could, the requisites for enjoying a long day, no one, even the most ennuyé, was bored at the prospect, especially as his invitations were invariably very exclusive, and I

know people who would rush into that quarter where is written—

Lasciate ogne speranza, o voi ch'entrate,

if the admissions were exclusive, and would decline Paradise if its golden gates were opened to the multitude.

We drove down to luncheon there at three, strolled in the grounds afterward, listened to the band of the Dashers in the open air, to some of the opera artistes in the music-room, boated on the river, or flirted and ate ice under the perfumy limes, according to custom in such affairs; dined at eight, and about eleven found our way to a large marquee opening out of the conservatories, decorated in such style as Sabretasche was certain to have anything under his management done, where our band played waltzes and galops till the first rays of morning broke over the summer sky.

There were Lady Ela with her stately beauty, and Mrs. Tite Delafield with her divine figure, and Madame de la Vieillecour with her courtly coqueties, (so stateful yet so skillful, that I have lived to thank God my fair-faced Gwen was faithless to her pledge, and that M. l'Ambassadeur has trusted his name to her—not I;) and there were De Vigne, and Curly, and Castleton, and countless others; in a word, all who had met the previous evening at the Molyneux' soirée, (except, to be sure, the Little Tressillian, who was only half a mile away, but in ignorance of the brilliant gathering at the Dilcoosha;) and there was, of course, Sabretasche's fiancée, so soon to be his bride, his wife—with the light of love in her brilliant violet eyes, and the glories of her coming future in the shadowless beauty of her face, which, fair as they were, no woman there could rival.

The luncheon was gay and brilliant; repartee flowed with the still *Aï*, and mots sparkled with the *Johannisberg*.

Sabretasche showed nowhere to better advantage than as a host; his Chesterfieldian courtesy, his graceful urbanity, his careful attention to everybody, and every trifle, above all, his art in starting conversation and drawing people out, always made parties at his house more charming than at any other; and, delightful as he had ever been in society, even when the curse of his bitter secret and his early shame was on him, you can fancy how delightful a host the Colonel was now that his fate was cloudless and Violet Molyneux his guest.

During the luncheon, De Vigne sat next to Leila Puffdoff, who, as I have before hinted, was willing to make more love to him than Granville cared to make to her. De Vigne was much set upon by fine ladies, partly for the chivalric aroma that hung about him from his campaign in Scinde, partly for the distinguished beauty of his face and form, and chiefly because he was so haughtily indifferent to them, and the romantic circumstances of his early marriage rendered him a sort of fruit défendu. The little Countess had really fallen in love with him, such love as young coquettes like her take—as they take their *sal volatile* or *eau de cologne*—as a little pleasant excitement; she flirted with him desperately during the luncheon, and made him row her on the river afterward, part of the grounds of the Dilcoosha sloping downward to the Thames, and drooping their willow and larch boughs into the water. De Vigne took the sculls, as in duty bound, and rowed her a good way down, under the arching branches; but though Lady Puffdoff put out all her charms, she could not lure De Vigne into anything as warm or tender as she would have liked; she was piqued—possibly what he wished to make her—bid him scull her back to the Dilcoosha, and, as soon as she was landed, went off to listen to Gardoni, with Crowndiamonds, Castleton's eldest brother, and a whole

troop of minor soupirants following and crowding round her. De Vigne was profoundly thankful to be released; he had a fancy to leave all these people and scenes, which were so stale to him and bored him to-day, though usually he was excessively fond of society, and to go and see Alma Tressillian, feeling a certain irresistible desire to have that little hand again in his, and hear the voice that had whispered him so soft a good night.

He knew the way by the river to St. Crucis, and turning from the gay party scattered over the picturesque grounds of the Dilcoosha, gathered in such groups as would have done for Boccaccio's stories or Watteau's pictures, he took the oars of the little boat which the Countess had just vacated, and pulled himself up the river to a point where he knew a path led to the farm-house, as he had once or twice walked down to the bank with Alma by it, and rowed her a mile or so on the water, amused with *her* amusement in seeing those steamers, barges, and cockle-shell boats in which Cockneys love to disport themselves on that certainly pretty, but, alas! how unodoriferous a stream.

He moored the boat to the bank, thinking of the careless days when he had pulled up the river with the Eton Eight, enjoying the glories of success at the Brocas and Little Surley with all the wild spirit and unsaddened ardor of boyhood, and walked onward to St. Crucis, with that swinging cavalry step which had beaten many good pedestrians and stalwart mountain guides in both hemispheres. He strode along, too, to uneasy thoughts; he was conscious of a keener desire to see the Little Tressillian than he would confess to himself, and, at the same time, he had a remorseful conviction that it might be better to stay away, a suggestion to which he was equally reluctant to listen. A quarter of an hour brought him in sight of St. Crucis; but with that sight he saw, too, what gave him no

remarkable pleasure—Curly, who had apparently forsaken the Dilcoosha for the same purpose as himself. Curly had just pushed open the gate and entered—entered as if he liked his destination; and De Vigne paused a moment behind him, under the road-side trees, wavering in his mind whether he should follow him or not. Where he stood he could see the garden, in all its untrained yet profuse summer beauty; the great chestnuts, with their green umbrageous boughs and snowy clustering blossoms, that the soft wind was scattering over the turf beneath them; and under the trees, on a rough bench, with her little black hat on her lap, and her palette and sketching-block at her feet, he saw Alma Tressillian, and beside her, bending eagerly forward, Vane Castleton. He, too, then, had left Sabretasche's fête to find his way after Alma! "Curse the fellow!" swore De Vigne, "how dare he come after her here?" If he had followed his instinct and his longing, he would have taken Castleton up by his coat-collar and kicked him out of the garden like a dog; though probably, for that matter, Castleton had as much right there as himself.

Curly had pushed open the gate and entered, and Alma, catching sight of him as he went across the garden, sprang up, left Castleton rather unceremoniously, and came to meet him with a glad greeting, and something of that gay, bright smile which De Vigne liked to consider his own and his unshared property. Curly answered it with an air more tender than mere compliment, and sat down beside her, giving Castleton such a glance as a man only gives to a rival who has forestalled him.

De Vigne took in the whole scene at a glance, and construed it as his skepticism and his knowledge of women suggested to him. The darker passions of his character rose up; the devil of jealousy entered into him; he turned

away in one of those moments of haughty anger and hot impatience which had sometimes cost him as much in one way as softer passions in another.

"She is a thorough-paced coquette, like all the rest," he thought. "I will not add another to the fools who pander to her vanity."

He swung round and retraced his steps, leaving Alma sitting under her favorite chestnut-trees with Castleton and Curly. It cut him to the soul that those men should be near her, having her smiles, looking in her eyes, teaching her the power, and, with the power, the artifices of her sex, gaining—who could say they would not?—one or other of them—their way into her heart! He was mad with himself for the jealousy he felt; and fiercely and futilely he tried to persuade himself, tried till at last he succeeded, that it was but his annoyance at finding Alma no more truthful or reliable than the rest of her sex, and his regret at the inevitable fate which would await Boughton Tressillian's adopted child if she listened to the love of Vane Castleton, or even of Curly; for Curly, though frank-hearted and honorable as a man could be, was young, wild, and held women lightly, as men of his age do.

All the fire—at all times more like a Southern than an English temperament—which lay asleep under the armor of ice which he had put on to guard himself from a sex that had wronged him, was stirred and kindled into flame. He might as yet seek to give them and conceal them to himself under other names, but at work within were his old foes—jealousy and passion. The gay glitter of society, as he joined a group under the fragrant limes of the Dilcoosha, where Violet, the Puffdoff, Madame de la Vieillecour, and others, were competing in skill as Toxopholites for some of the loveliest prizes Sabretasche had rifled from Howell and James's stores, seemed strangely at variance

with the tempest working up in his heart; and while he smiled and jested with the women there, he could not forget for one instant the Little Tressillian, as he had left her sitting under the great chestnut-boughs smiling on Curly and Vane Castleton. It was a far greater relief to him than he would own to himself, when not long afterward he saw Castleton discussing the merits and demerits of her bow with Ela Ashburnington; and in half an hour's time, or a trifle more, heard Curly chatting frothy badinage with empty-headed and sylph-waisted Mrs. Tite Delafield, though, following the dictates and bias of his nature, there was no bodily injury he could not have found it in his heart to wreak upon them both, even on his old Frestonhills pet, for having won those gay bright smiles under the chestnut-trees at St. Crucis.

He would scarcely have been less wrathful if he had heard Crowndiamonds saying to his brother,

"Where the deuce have you been to, Vane? Helena sent me to look for you, but I couldn't find you anywhere."

"I was after something far prettier than the old woman," was Castleton's *recherché* reply.

"Helena" was nobody less than my Lady Molyneux, with whom this noble scion of the House of Tiara had been lié, according to on dits, in a closer friendship than Jockey Jack would have relished had he not been taught to take such friendships as matters of course.

"I've been to see that little girl Tressillian—called to look at her pictures, of course; studios are deuced nice excuse, by Jove!"

And Lord Vane curled his whiskers and laughed at some joke not wholly explained.

"What, that little thing that was at Helena's last night," asked Crowndiamonds, "that you and the other fellows

made such a fuss about? Heaven knows why! she's too petite for me; and I can show you a score of ten times finer women in the coulisses any night. Besides, somebody said she was De Vigne's property!"

"What if she were? If he don't take care of his game, other men may poach it, mayn't they?"

The summer day passed away in colors to Violet as glorious as those that tinged its evening sky when the western sun went down behind the limes in its purpureal splendor, shrouding the evening star in its refulgence, and bathing in its golden glow every spear of grass that glittered in the dew. Bright as the day was Violet's glad enjoyment of it, brilliant as the sunset glories rose her present and her future; secure she felt from the gray twilight or the starless night, which overshadow the brightest human life not less surely than they overtake the fairest summer day. Of twilight taint, much less of midnight shadow, Violet's young and cloudless existence knew no fear. I have never seen on earth—not even imagined in song nor idealized in art—any face so expressive of perfect happiness and brilliant youth as hers. When it was in repose there was the light of a smile on her lips, and the joyousness of the spirit within seemed to linger far down in the sunny depths of her eyes, as on the violet waves of the Mediterranean we have seen the gleam and the glow of the rays from a sunrise hidden from our own view. It made one think of Petrarch's "*lampeggiar dell' angelico riso*," save that Violet's smile was more tender and more sure than the evanescent play of lightning; there was something in her face that touched even the most blasé and cynical among us, and subdued the most supercilious or systematic of all those women of the world into a vague regret for the spring-time of their days, when they, too, were in their beaux jours, and they, too, believed in Love and Life.

‘Comme elle est heureuse!’ said Madame de la Vieillecour to me—one of the Duchess’s favorite affectations was never speaking her native language—“et elle doit l’être, cher Arthur; elle va épouser celui qu’elle adore!”

And madame heaved a sigh, as if she, too, might not have married where she had *said* she adored, if she had not worshiped more tenderly still the Vieillecour diamonds and thirty descents and ambassadorial splendor.

“Pardon, madame,” said I, naïvely; “mais je croyais que l’adoration allait à tout le monde, *excepté*, à l’époux?”

Madame colored through her dainty rouge, and sighed again.

“Ah, mon ami, ne vous moquez pas de moi. Vous ne concevez pas comment—nous autres femmes—nous sommes sacrifiées aux préjugés du monde!”

“Mais c’est un holocaust, madame,” laughed I, “comme celui de Myrrha, présenté de très bonne volonté!”

The Duchess was annoyed, and, to punish me, forsook sentiment, and coquetted to desperation with a great pet of hers, a cousin of M. de la Vieillecour’s, the Marquis de Larisse Torallié, over her favorite vanilla ice.

Perhaps she *did* regret for a fleeting moment—on the universal principle that what we have not must be better than what we have—that she had given up her girlish dreams for the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, pleasant pomps and vanities though they be, and high price as the most romantic idealist and the greatest saint will alike pay for them. Perhaps so: perhaps the heart of Gwen Brandling might not be wholly dead in the Duchess de la Vieillecour, though it was dead to me; and if it were not, Violet’s fair face might well wake it up, stamped on that face as there were a mind beyond the glittering bagatelles of her rank, and a love that, like Francesca’s, would endure in the midst of woe. I think

there were few of us who did not involuntarily wish her gladness—none of us who did not afterward remember the joyous beauty of Violet Molynieux that night. So brilliant and delicate a flower surely the tempest might have spared! Sabretasche, and his young love so soon to be his wife—to begin a life that would be to him new youth and to her the heaven of her ideal—gave themselves up to the intoxication of the hour. Never had either of them been more brilliant; never had Violet given freer rein to the joyous spirits of her nature; never had he more completely surrendered himself to the new happiness he had won! He loved her with a strangely tender love, intensified by the poetry and earnestness, amounting even to melancholy, natural to that part of his character which the world had never discovered in its courted and wearied man of fashion and of pleasure. He loved her, as we love very rarely, for

As those who dote on odors pluck the flowers,
And place them on their breast, but place to die;
Thus the frail beings we should fondly cherish
Are laid within our bosoms but to perish.

He loved her *better* than himself. Sweet hours they passed together that day, fond words they spoke in the perfect union of their hearts, glowing ideals of their radiant future he whispered to her as, when they escaped unnoticed from the crowd, he led her through her own apartments, locked to the ingress of others.

“Ah! Violet, time has leaden wings!” he whispered, in the solitude of the conservatories, as the ball drew to a close, and her mother waited for her. “A fortnight is not long, yet to me, while it keeps you from me, it seems eternity! My love, my darling, every moment that we are parted is waste of life and loss of happiness. Would to God you were mine now!”

The soft rose-hue that wavered in her cheeks, the low sigh, love's tenderest interpreter, that parted her lips—breathed from the very fullness of her joy, as flowers in the noon sunlight droop their heads in ecstasy too great to bear—re-echoed his wish, though words were silent.

"You will love me always?" she whispered; "love me like this, Vivian; never less tenderly, never less warmly, never coolly, calmly, chillily, as men learn, they say, to love women whom they have won?"

"Never, my own love! Indifference, calmness, chill domestic affection were death to me as to you. My love has ever been as passionate as my native Southern suns; for you it will be as changeless and eternal."

"Then what can part us?" murmured Violet, lifting her face to his, with a smile upon her lips, and in her eyes the happiness secure from all terrors and all tarnish—happiness, tender, cloudless, and triumphant. "No power on earth! And so well do we love, that if death took one, he would strike the other!"

"Hush!" whispered Sabretasche, fondly. "Why speak of death or sorrow, my dearest? Our fate is life and joy, and life and joy together! We love; and in that word all the passionate happiness earth can know is given to us both."

He paused, and the silence that is sweeter than any words supplied his broken eloquence, stifled by its own joy, and Violet's upraised eyes gave him an answer fuller than any words, cold interpreters at best of the heart's deepest utterances.

When all his other guests had left the Dilcoosha, Lady Molyneux gave him the third seat in her carriage back to town. He needed to return in time for early parade, and the drive gave him an additional hour and a half with Violet. The summer dawn was very bright and still, with

not a trace of human life abroad, save some gardeners' carts wending their way slowly to Covent Garden with their fresh pile of newly-gathered vegetables or fragrant load of nodding hot-house flowers—flowers destined to wither in the soft, cruel hand of some jeweled beauty, or droop and die, pining for their native sunlight, under the smoke-shroud of the Great City, as sweet natures and warm hearts shrink or harden under the blight of a chill world or the pressure of an uncongenial existence. There was no sign of human life, but the birds were lifting up their little voices in their morning hymns, sweet gushes of natural song, and the dew was sparkling among the daisied grass, and the southerly wind was tossing the wayside boughs up in its play, and filling the air with a fragrance, brought miles and miles on its rapid wings from the free, fresh woodlands far away.

There was a soft sunshiny beauty in the summer dawn that chimed sweet cadence with their thoughts as Violet and Sabretasche drove homeward; while Lady Molyneux—worked throughout the season for fashion's sake as hard as Hood's poor shirtmaker for very life—slept, though she would have denied it, tranquilly and well, muffled in the swansdown of her opera-cloak. Violet and Sabretasche enjoyed the sweet daybreak as people do whose hearts are full of gladness; she, with that love of all fair things, and that susceptibility to externals natural to youth and to a heart that has never yet known care; he, with that capacity for happiness and that poetic keenness to all things beautiful in life and nature which had in boyhood made the murmur of the Mediterranean waves, or the setting of the sun, or the sighing of southern winds among the olive-groves, sufficient pleasure to his senses, and which had now awakened into new life, after long years of artificial glare and fashionable excitements, at the touch of real and un-

selfish love. With the song of the birds, and the gleam of the bright morning rays, and the sweep of the fresh west wind, their hearts beat in unison and joy. When the future is fair to us, how fair looks the green and laughing earth!

Violet looked up in her lover's eyes:

"Oh, Vivian, how beautiful is life!"

"With love!"

Life and love were both beautiful to him as he whispered a farewell but for a few hours in Violet's ear, bent his head for one soft though hurried kiss from the lips whose words of affection were consecrated as solely to him as their caresses, and descended from the carriage at the door of his house in Park Lane. God help him! hours of mortal anguish waited for him there.

II.

PARK LANE.

It was past six o'clock when he reached his home, and, not caring to undress, Sabretasche threw himself down on one of the luxurious couches of that favorite room of his on the ground-floor, which adjoined and opened into his beloved studio, where the morning light, which he had bade his servants admit through the half-closed persiennes, fell full on his easel, on the portrait of Violet Molyneux (which he was doing in pastel for her father, the Francesca being hung in Violet's morning room at the Dilcoosha) which beamed from the canvas with such a radiant, animated, spirituelle light upon it, that it was hard to believe it was but paper and colored chalks. He lay full length upon the couch, smoking his perfumed narghilé, with that voluptuous indolence habitual to him—looking at the pic-

ture where his own art had re-created the beauty of his young love—feeling in memory the loving, lingering touch of her lips—and dreaming over that fresh happiness whose solitary reveries were dearer to him now than the society or the sleep which he had used to court as Lethean draughts.

His life had never seemed so sweet, the peace he had won so perfect; and when his servant rapped gently at the door, though infinitely too sweet-tempered, and, truth to tell, too lazy to irritate himself about trifles, he was annoyed and sorry to be disturbed.

“I told you not to interrupt me till I rang for my chocolate,” he said, in that low voice which somehow or other gained him more obedience than the louder tone or more angry command of other men, from his servants, who stayed with him long, and liked no other service after his.

“I beg your pardon, Colonel,” answered his man, submissively. “I should not have interrupted you, but there is a person asking to see you upon business, and, as he said it was of great importance, I did not know, sir, what would be best to do.”

“What is always best to do is to obey me to the letter—you can never be wrong then. The person could have waited. What is his name?”

“He would not give it, sir; he wished to see you.”

“I see no one before two o’clock in the day. Go, tell him so.”

The man obeyed; but in a minute or two he returned.

“The gentleman will take no denial, Colonel. He begs you to see him.”

“What an impertinent fellow!” said Sabretasche to himself, with a surprised hauteur on his delicate features. “Tell him I will *not* see him—that is sufficient. I see no one who does not send in his card.”

“But, sir—but——”

"Well, what? Speak out," said Sabretasche, irritated at the disturbance. It seemed to let in the disagreeables of outer life, and jar on the sweet thoughts so dear to his poet's soul and lover's heart.

"But, sir, he says his business concerns you, and—and Miss Molyneux, sir."

The man hesitated—even servants living with Sabretasche caught something of his delicacy and refinement, and he knew intuitively how the mention of her name would annoy his master. A flush of astonishment and anger rose over Sabretasche's pale forehead. He was but too sensitive over Violet, perhaps, from what he considered as the deep disgrace of his first marriage, and he almost disliked to hear servants' lips breathe his idol's name. "Show him in," he said, briefly, signing the man away. He lay still, full length on the couch, smoking from his hookah, stroking the Cid with one hand, but the flush of anger had not left his face, and a vague dread had taken the place of his peaceful and luxurious happiness. His past had been too fateful for him to join in Violet's cloudless and fearless trust in the future. One of the bitterest curses of sorrow is the *fear* that it leaves behind it, making us, with the sweetest cup to our lips, dread the unseen hand that will dash it down, hanging the funereal pall of the past over the most glittering bridal clothes of the present, and poisoning the sunshine that lies before us with the memory of those clouds which, having so often come before, must, it seems to us, come yet again. When sorrow has once been upon us, we have no longer faith in life—we have but Hope, and Hope, God-given as she is, is but fearful, and fluttering, and evanescent at best.

He lay still; the fair morning sunlight falling clear upon him and upon the brilliant and witching face glowing on the easel at his side. Vulgar and cruel eyes looked in on

the scene—at the luxurious and beautiful studio, where every trifle was a gem of art; where the morning sunlight fell sweet and subdued through the rich folds of the curtains, and the air was redolent of a dreamy and delicious perfume—at the man of aristocracy and refinement, with all his grace and beauty, all his delicate and artistic surroundings; and a vulgar and cruel mind gloated with delight on the desolation and torture he had power to introduce into that peaceful and brilliant life. Sabretasche lifted his eyes with his characteristic indolence and hauteur—as he did so, the slight flush upon his face died utterly away; he grew pallid as death. He saw Guiseppe da' Castrone—the man linked with his hours of greatest shame, of most bitter misery—the brother and the emissary of his faithless wife. Involuntarily he rose, fascinated by the sight of the man connected with the deepest wrong and deepest sorrow of his life, and the Italian looked at him with a smile that showed his glittering white teeth, as a hound, who has seized the noblest of Highland royals at bay, shows his in the cruel struggle. Sabretasche spoke first, in Italian, with all the loathing that he felt for this man who had stooped to live upon gold wrung from the husband that his own sister had wronged.

“Signór Castrone, this is a very unexpected intrusion. Your negotiations with me are at an end. Allow me to request you to withdraw.”

“Wait one moment, Signór Sabretasche,” answered the Neapolitan, with a cunning leer in his bright sharp eyes. “*Are our negotiations at an end?*”

“So entirely, that if you do not leave my presence I shall be compelled to bid my servants make you.”

The Italian laughed. The cold, contemptuous tone of the high-born gentleman stung him, and gave him but the greater gusto for his task.

"Not so fast, buon' amico, not so fast; we are brothers-in-law, remember! It would not do for us to quarrel."

The blood crimsoned Sabretasche's face up to his very temples; a passion of scorn quivered over his delicate lips.

"The tie you dare to mention and appeal to, *ought* to be your bitterest disgrace. Since you are dead to shame, I need feel none for you; and if you do not leave the room, my servants will compel you."

"Per -fede!" said the Italian, with a scoffing laugh. "You will scarcely call your household in to witness your connection with me. They can hear the secret if you choose; it matters nothing to me; only I fancied that now, of all times, you would rather have kept it under-hand. You are going to be married, caro, I hear, to a lovely English girl—is it not so?"

Sabretasche answered nothing, but stretched out his hand to the bell-handle in the wall nearest him. He felt it beneath him to bandy words with such a man as Giuseppe da' Castrone, who, a sort of gentlemanlike lazzarone, half swindler, half idler, a Southern *Bohémien*, had lived on his wits till, as inevitably in that precarious mode of subsistence, he had lost all the traces of honor, or delicacy, or better feeling, with which he perhaps might have begun life. He touched Sabretasche's wrist as the Colonel's white, slender hand was approaching the bell. Sabretasche flung off the grasp, as if it had been pollution; but before he could ring, the Neapolitan spoke, still with a smile, half cunning, half malicious:

"Would it not have been wiser, Eccellenza, before you had taken one wife, to have made sure you had lost the other?"

With all his calm nerve and habitual impassiveness, Sabretasche started, and a deadly anguish of dread fastened upon him. But he spoke with the proud and contemptuous

tone for which Castrone hated him so bitterly; for though he had done dirty tricks enough to brazen him to any shame, the Italian was still too sensitive, amid his coarseness, not to shrink from the disgust which the fastidious Englishman had never scrupled to conceal in the short interviews they had had during twenty long years.

"Yours is a very stale device," said Sabretasche, calmly. "Too melodramatic to extort money from me. If you want a few scudi to buy you macaroni, or game away at dominoes, ask for them in plain words, and I may give you them out of charity."

He stood leaning his arm upon the top of his easel; his tall and graceful figure erect; the pride of the patrician, and the scorn and loathing of the man of honor and refinement, written on his pale features, and in the depths of his soft, mournful eyes; speaking gently and slowly—but, how bitterly!—in his low, silvery voice. The tone, the glance, the mien, woke all the darkest malice that slept in the Italian's heart for his sister's high-born and high-souled husband. His eyes glittered like an angry animal's; he dropped the smoother tone which he had used before, for the one of coarse and malicious vindictiveness natural to him.

"Santa Maria! don't take that proud tone with me, carissimo, or I may make you glad to change it, and turn your threats into prayers. You are not quite so near happiness as you fancy, my fine gentleman. That is your young love's picture, no doubt? Ah! it is a fair face; it will go hard to lose it, I dare say? It would go harder still if one of the proud, fastidious Sabretasches were tried for bigamy! It would not look pretty in the London papers, where his name has been so often as a leader of fashion and——"

Before he could end his sentence Sabretasche had sprung

at him, rapidly and lightly as a panther, and seized him by the throat:

“Wretch, you lie! How dare you to insult me! By Heaven! if it were not too great honor for you, I would kill you where you stand!”

So fierce was the grasp of his white slender fingers, in the passion into which his sweet temper and gentle nature was at length roused, that the Italian, almost throttled, struggled with difficulty from his hold.

“You lie!” said Sabretasche, flinging him off with a force that sent him reeling from him. “The woman whom you venture to recall as my wife is dead!”

“Per Dio, is she? You will find to the contrary, bel signór. Basta! but your hands have no baby’s grasp; you had better have joined them in prayer, best brother-in-law. If you marry the English beauty, you will have two wives on your shoulders, and one has been more than you have managed!”

Sabretasche’s eyes were fixed upon him, fascinated by horror as an antelope by a rattlesnake. “Two wives—two wives!” he muttered incoherently, like a man in delirium. “She is dead, I tell you—she is dead!” Then the sense of what the Neapolitan had said came clearer to his mind, and, with an effort, he regained his calm and haughty tone, speaking slowly between his teeth: “Signór Castrone, once more I will request you, for your own sake, to leave this house quietly, without compelling me to the force I am loth to use, out of regard for the dead. With her, the grave buries all past errors; but with you, I still snall treat as with any other swindler and perjurer who tries to coin money through stories only fit to chicanery boys. I am not a likely person to be terrified by secret innuendoes or open insults. This time I will let you go—you are beneath my anger—but if you intrude yourself

into this house, or venture to approach me again, I shall call in the law to rid me of a pest."

Something in his voice, which had ever a strange spell for man or woman, and which now, soft as it was in the utterance of his native Italian, bore that subtle magic of command which superiority of character and of mind always confer, had awed the coarser nature into silence while he spoke; but when he paused, Castrone broke out into a long, discordant, malicious laugh, jarring like jangled bells upon every nerve and chord in the listener's heart.

"Diavolo! buon' amico, it will be I, more likely, who have the law upon *you*! Sylvia is alive—alive! and your lawful wife, Colonel Sabretasche, from whom nothing but death can ever divorce you; and I do not think she loves you well enough, milor, to let another woman reign in her stead without making you pay the heaviest penalty she can for your double marriage! Wait! you saw the death of a Silvia da' Castrone in *Galignani*, I dare say? You had the certificate of such a death from Naples? Very possibly: but her aunt Silvia da' Castrone died last May in Naples, and it was her obituary that you saw. If Sylvia died, (as Santa Maria forbid!) it would be recorded as what she is, and what she will be while life lasts—however you may try to alter it—the wife of Vivian Sabretasche. Sylvia lives—nay, she is in London, ready to proclaim her right to your name to the Signorina Molyneux—is not that your new love?—or, if your union with the English girl takes place before she can do so, she will then prosecute you according to your English law. She was married in England, you remember; she has not lost the certificate, and the register is correct in Marylebone Church—I saw it but this morning. It is no idle tale, I tell you, buon' amico. I know you too well to try and palm one off upon you unless I could substantiate it. Your wife is alive,

fratello mio! I fear me there will be some few difficulties in the way of your marrying your young beauty!"

As the Italian spoke in his coarse brutal tones, with his low, malicious laugh like the hissing of a serpent, every word he uttered falling like seething fire on his listener's heart, Sabretasche stood gazing upon him. In his parted lips, his eyes wide opened with the horror of amazement on every feature, already blanched and wan, was marked the deadly anguish of despair, mingled with the vague and almost dreamy terror of this shock, so sudden and so horrible; then, as the full meaning of the words he heard cut gradually into his brain, his strength gave way, and he sank down upon his couch, covering his face with his hands, while great drops of agony stood upon his brow, and a bitter cry broke from the great passion that had grown and strengthened and entwined itself around his heart, till it were easier to drain that heart of its life-blood than its love.

The Neapolitan stood by, gloating at the ruin he had wrought, watching with the fiendish malice of a coarse and brutal nature the suffering of a higher and a nobler. He had often longed to revenge the silent scorn, the cutting contempt, the high-bred hauteur with which the man upon whose gold he lived had treated him; he had often thirsted for the time to come when Sabretasche should be humbled before him—when it should be his turn to hold the power which could at will remove or let fall the sword that hung above his victim's head—when it should be his to torture that only too sensitive and too deeply feeling nature, and to see, writhing in anguish before him, the haughty gentleman at whose glance and whose word he had so often flinched and slunk away. He stood by and watched him—unspeakably dear to the vindictive Italian was the mute anguish before him. Sabretasche had forgotten all sense

of his presence, all memory of the coarse, cruel eyes that saw the grief of one who so long had persuaded the world that he valued life too little to give it aught but smiles: heart, mind, and sense had all flown to her, his young, pure, true, idolized love, who now might never be his wife. The hissing, mocking tones of the Italian broke in on the sanctity of his silent grief. Castrone laughed the laugh of a devil at the fell despair wrought by his own work.

“Milor does not seem charmed to hear of his wife; it does not seem to bring him the connubial rapture one would expect?”

The jeer, the taunt, the mockery of his woe stung into madness the heart of the man whose over-refinement and susceptibility taught him to shrink even from the delicate sympathy of friends, and whose keen sensitiveness had oftentimes won him the imputation of lack of feeling, because he felt too deeply to bear to unveil his sorrows to the glare of daylight and the sneers of men.

Sabretasche started, as at the sharp touch of the knife at a fresh wound, and shivered as if with cold, the cold of death in Arctic regions. He lifted his face, aged in those brief moments as by long years of woe; but the old pride and shrinking refinement were not dead in him yet. He caught the eyes of Guiseppe da' Castrone; and though he had died, not another sign should have escaped him of the anguish which would have been food for ridicule and joy to the foe he loathed. But he could not hide his face from the Neapolitan's cruel gaze, and *there* the brother of his wife read desolation enough to satiate a fiend.

“If this alone were your errand,” he said, with effort—and how hollow and altered his voice sounded even in his own ears—“you have no further excuse for intrusion. I shall take means for verifying your story; and now begone, while I can keep my hands from revenging your insults.”

"Here is your proof," said Castrone, briefly.

Sabretasche mechanically read what he held to him; that too was brief.

"If you will it, you can see me once more to-day—but only to remind you that while I live no other can call herself your wife.

SYLVIA SABRETASCHE."

Though he had not seen it for more than twenty long years, he knew the writing to be his wife's—the woman from whom no laws would rid him. All hope died in him then; he *knew* that she lived—the wife who had wedded him to misery and disgrace; the wife who now came forward, after the absence and the silence of twenty years, to ban him from the better life to which a gentler and a purer hand was about to lead him.

"*I see her!*" he repeated, indignant passion flashing out amid the unutterable anguish of his face. "*I see the woman who made my youth miserable, my manhood purposeless; who disgraced my name, who betrayed my love; who for twenty years has lived upon my gold, yet never addressed to me one word of repentance, regret, remorse; never one word to confess her crimes; never one prayer to ask forgiveness of her falsehood! I see her! How dare she ask it? How dare she sign herself by the name she has polluted? Go, tell her that she will bribe me no more, that she is free to do her worst that devils can prompt her, that she may proclaim her marriage with me far and wide; I care not! She may write her lying story in all the papers if she will; she may persuade all England and all Italy that she is a fond, deserted wife, and I a cruel, faithless husband; she may bring my name into courts if she choose, to sue me for her maintenance; but tell her, once for all, I give her no more bribes. I disown her,*

though the laws will not divorce her. Now go; go, I tell you, or by Heaven I will not let you leave in peace!"

The fierce but coward nature of the Neapolitan quailed before the mighty anguish and concentrated passions flashing from the calm and melancholy eyes of the usually gentle and impassive Englishman. He spoke more softly, more timidly, smoothing down the coarseness of his natural tone.

"But, signór, listen. If you feel thus toward my poor sister, and will not believe that your hatred to her is without cause, would you not rather that the world knew nothing of your marriage?"

"Since it cannot be broken, all the world may know it. I will bribe you no longer. Begone!"

"Nay, one word—but one word, signór. If I could show you how you might still wed your young English love——"

How iron a nerve Sabretasche needed to still the anguish that seized him with the chill horror of a death spasm, as the Neapolitan's rough hand touched the dearest thought, the strongest passion, the wildest despair of his life, his love ever so tenacious over its secret, now full of such anguished tenderness! The struggle lasted but a moment, but that moment was time enough for the Neapolitan to note the torture he inflicted, while the fierce gesture of his listener warned him to hasten, if he would be heard; for coarse though Castrone's own thoughts were, and deadened his susceptibilities, instinct told him how sharper than a dagger's thrust, and more bitter than poison to the man of pride and reserve and refinement was this rending of the veil of the one sacred temple by a coarse and sacrilegious hand.

"Listen," he said in his sweet, swift language, with the glitter of cunning in his keen, bright eyes. "No one now

living knows of your union with my sister save yourself, and Sylvia, and I. It is utterly unknown in England; men do not dream that you are a married man, much less will they think of turning over the register of Marylebone Church for a date of more than twenty years ago. Your young love, her father, her friends, all your circle, need never know your wife is living unless you, or she, or I tell them. If any question ever arose about your first marriage, your word, and the certificate, if you had it, of a Silvia da' Castrone's death, (and our aunt Silvia was the same age as her niece,) would be amply sufficient. They would never insult a gentleman like Vivian Sabretasehe by doubting his word, and prying into details of his past history! Sylvia and I are poor, signór mio, very poor; per Baccho, she has luxurious habits, and I—an Italian who is noble cannot soil his hands with work! We are Southern, we love our dolce, our pleasure, our ease, and, Santa Maria! we have none of the three. Signór mio, we are as poor as the rats in the Vicaria; and if, as you say, you will not support your wife as you have done hitherto, she must apply to your law courts for maintenance. She *will* do so, and, basta! it is no more than her rights; had she followed my counsels, she would not have let them lie unasserted so long. But she bids me make you this offer, and it is a noble and a generous one from a wronged woman; still, she feels that you hate her, and would not force herself upon you, nor, now that her own life is blighted, ruin yours in return. If you will pay us down twenty thousand—it is but a drop in the ocean out of all your wealth—only twenty thousand, signór; we are very moderate!—we will bind ourselves—your wife and I, sole living witnesses of your marriage—by every oath most sacred in your eyes and in ours—(and we Catholics keep our oaths; we are not blasphemers like your churchmen, who kiss the book in

your law courts and perjure themselves five seconds after !)—we will swear by every oath in earth or heaven, never to reveal your marriage to any mortal soul. You may wed your young English love—see, her fair face woos you from the glowing canvas—she will never know that another lives who might dispute her title; you may win her and marry her; you may have all the rapture for which your heart thirsts. Men say you love her strangely well—and you are more than half Southern, signór; yours will be no calm and frigid happiness, such as content the cold, tame English. With that face—see how the fond, brilliant eyes follow you even from the dumb canvas, as though in prayer to you never to desert her—with that face beside you, that heart beating with yours, gods might envy you your paradise! And if *our* lips are silenced—and silent they will be as the grave—none need ever know, need ever guess that any woman ever bore your name before her. You need have no scruple, for, since you say you disown her, whatever the law decrees, you must feel as thoroughly divorced as though men's words had unlocked your fetters, and, per Dio! if twenty long years' separation is not divorce in Heaven's sight, what *is*? Accept Sylvia's offer—your marriage is virtually dissolved as though no tie of law existed—and long years of love and happiness await you with the woman you idolize. Refuse it, your marriage will be known all over England beyond hope of concealment or dissolution, and as long as her life lasts you will be the husband of my sister, and you will see your English girl the wedded wife of some other and some happier-fated man. Choose, signór—and the choice is very easy—you who have never hesitated to pay any price for pleasure, will hardly refuse so small a price for happiness! Choose, signór, the game is in your own hands.”

With what subtle ingenuity, what devilish skill. was the

temptation put! The Neapolitan watched the speeding of his poisoned arrows, and saw that they had hit their quarry. Sabretasche leaned against the wall, pallid as the dead, his lips pressed in to keep down the agony within him to which he would not give vent; a shiver as though of icy cold again passed over his frame, burning as it was with feverish passions; he breathed in quick, short gasps, as if panting for very life; his eyes were fixed on what his tempter had truly termed that fond and brilliant face, whose loving gaze turned on him from the canvas, tempted him, how fiercely! how pitilessly! as woman's beauty has ever tempted man's honor to its fall, as the Philistine tempted the Nazarene from his vow, the Lydian Queen Alcmena's son from his strength, the Egyptian siren "lost Anthony" from glory, victory, and life! The Italian saw the struggle, and gluttoned in his vengeance. Heaven knows we need be strong indeed to suffer in such a struggle and come out victorious in the fight! Sabretasche had been more than mortal if he had not wavered and trembled under it; he to whom pleasure had been law, and to wish was to have! How fierce was the temptation no man could ever know! Was he a god to put aside the glittering cup of life, and take up with unshaking hand the deadly poison that would wither all the future?

On the one side was a brilliant and golden life for him and for the woman dearest to him on earth; on the other hand was desolation, dark, dreary, hopeless, for them both. Not he alone would suffer; it was her doom that his own will would seal, her head on which the blow would fall, unless he choose to arrest it; she out of whose young life he would crush all the glory; she whom he was called upon to murder with a more cruel stroke than the blow that honor forced from the Roman on his sons. If it had

chanced that he had lived in those stoic ages, and duty had bidden him slay the woman he loved, we in these later times should have mourned over his cruel fate, and marvelled at the nerve that, armed by honor, could quench the light from those fond, tender eyes that only beamed for him; yet if *now* he shrink from striking the heart that trusts him, and hangs all its hopes upon him, with a far keener thrust, and banishing forever from her life its glorious and gracious youth, none will pity him, none excuse him that his hand may tremble and his breaking heart may fail!

How fierce was the temptation! There on the lifeless easel beamed the fair, fond face, pleading for her joy and his own. Before him stretched two lives: one radiant and blessed, full of the love and rest for which his heart was weary, the beloved companionship, the sympathy of thought and feeling, all that makes existence of beauty and of value; the other dark and desolate, with no hope, no release from the chains that would fetter him as the bonds that bound the living man to the dead corpse, no relief from the haunting passions, the inextinguishable love which would burn within, till stilled in the cold slumber of the grave. All wooed him to the one; all nature, all manhood, all inborn affections rebelled against the other. He *had* disowned his wife; he knew that in the sight of God Violet alone could ever have right to bear the title. In his own heart he considered his marriage annulled since the day he left his wife in Naples, as virtually and as entirely as though dissolved by a jury's verdict; in his own heart he would have held himself fully justified if he had then wedded Violet by vows the most sacred human lips could frame.

All urged him to listen to his tempter—all—save honor, and that shrank from the stain of deceit and falsehood. He had paid down all prices save this for pleasure; he would

not pay this now, even though the barter were hell for heaven. He would himself have wagered life, or honor, or soul to win her, but for her sake he would not wrong her. His eyes were still fastened upon her picture, and there her eyes answered his—clear, fond, true, even while tempting him his better angel still. He could not win *her* by wrong, woo *her* with deception, stand beside the altar with her hand in his, and her gaze upon him, and vow there was no impediment between their marriage, while he knew that his first wife lived, who, however he might disown her, would have legal right to tear the wedding-ring from Violet's finger and deny her title to his name and home. He loved her, Heaven knows, better than life itself; he loved her too well to win her by a wrong, and all the knightly and high-souled thoughts that slept beneath the worldly exterior of the man of fashion and of pleasure revolted from the lie, the deception, and the shame of betraying a heart that trusted him by concealment and by falsehood. How could he give his darling his name, knowing it was not hers; call her his wife, knowing the title was denied her; live with her day by day, knowing at every moment he had wronged her and deceived her; receive her fond words, her innocent caresses, with the burden of that deadly shadow between them, which, if she saw it not, would never leave his sight, nor rid him of its haunting presence? Deadly was the temptation—deadly the struggle under it. His eyes were still fastened on the picture, whose brilliant beauty and grace stirred all his passions, but whose clear, true eyes still saved him from himself. Great drops stood upon his brow, his lips turned white as in the agonies of death, his hands clinched as in the combat with some actual foe, and the anguish of his heart broke out in a low moan:

“I have no strength for this!”

“Why endure it, then?” whispered the low, subtle voice of the Italian. “Freedom is in your own hands.”

But the tempter had lost his power—the man whom the world said denied himself no pleasure and no wish, and whom society had whispered as a heartless and selfish libertine, put aside the joys that could only be bought with dishonor. His eyes flashed with concentrated passion, and over the death-like pallor of his face rose a deep crimson hue; he caught the slight form of the Neapolitan in his grasp:

“Hound! dare you tempt me to wrong *her*—take your price!”

He lifted him from the ground with the iron clasp of his left hand, opened the door of his studio, and threw him down the four steps that parted the chamber from the rest of the corridor leading to it. The Italian lay there, stunned for the moment with the fall; Sabretasche closed the door upon him, and went in again alone—alone, in what a solitude!

Long hours afterward he reissued from his chamber and entered his carriage, drawing down both blinds. A strange silence fell upon his house; many of his servants loved him, through a service of kindness on the one hand, and fidelity on the other, and they knew instinctively that some great sorrow had fallen on their master. Very few minutes took him to Lowndes Square. The footmen, accustomed to his entrance half a dozen times a day, were about to show him, unasked, to the room where Violet was; but Sabretasche signed them back, and went up the stairs to her boudoir alone. At the door he paused—what wonder? Could his heart help but fail him when he was about to quench all radiance from the eyes that took their brightness only from him? to carry the chill of death into a young life which had hitherto not known even a passing shade? to

say to the woman pledged to be his wife, "I am the husband of another!" It is no exaggeration that he would have gone with thanksgiving to his own grave; life could have no greater bitterness for him than this.

Many moments passed; the time told off by the thick, slow throbs of his heart; then he opened the door and entered.

Violet sat in her favorite rose-velvet chair, her birds singing above her head, rich-hued flowers around her; the sunshine full upon her delicate dress, her bright chestnut hair, her lovely face the incarnation of beauty, youth, and joy. She looked up as the door opened, dropped her book, and sprang forward to her lover, her hands outstretched, her smile full of delight and gladness; not even a trace of long passed shadows on the fair young brow that had never known care, or sorrow, or remorse. In her joy, not noticing the change upon his face, she welcomed him with fond words and fonder caresses, each touch of her soft lips falling on his cheek, to him like scorching fire.

"Oh, Vivian!" she cried, "you said you would be here four hours ago, and how I have been watching for you! If you knew how long ten minutes seem without you, you would never be away from me if you could help it. You know I don't believe in military duties! I should be your only thought."

She looked up in his face as she spoke the last words, but as she did so, her gay smile faded, and the sweet laughter from her eyes quenched in the shadow that already fell upon her from the curse he bore.

"Vivian, my darling! you are not well. Oh, Heaven! what is it?"

He pressed her madly in his arms. "Hush, hush, or you will kill me."

The color fled from her face; her eyes were full of piti-

ful fear and half-conscious anguish, like a startled deer catching the first distant ring of the hunters' feet. She hid her face upon his breast, and clung to him in dread of the unknown horror, while her voice rose in a plaintive cry, "Vivian, dearest! what has happened—no evil—to you?"

He held her in his arms as if no earthly power should rend her from him; and his lips quivered with anguish. "I *cannot* tell you—the worst that could happen to us both. Would to Heaven I had died ere I linked your fate to mine!"

Clinging to him more closely, she looked up into his burning and tearless eyes, full of such unutterable tenderness, such unspeakable despair; there she read or guessed the truth, and, with a bitter wail, her arms unloosed their clasp, and she sank down from his embrace, lying on the ground in all her delicate beauty, stricken by her great grief, crushed and unconscious, like broken flowers in a tempest.



PART THE SEVENTEENTH.

I.

HOW VIOLET MOLYNEUX TRANSLATED FIDELITY.

CAN you not fancy how eagerly all town, ever on the *qui vive* after scandal and gossip, darted like the vultures on a dying lion on the story of Vivian Sabretasche's marriage? They were so outraged at its having been so long concealed so carefully, that those who collected scandales of their neighbors as industriously and persistently as Paris cheffoniers their rags, grubbing for them often in

quite as filthy places, revenged themselves for the wrong he had done them, by telling it, garbled and distorted in every way that could be suggested by malice and the inborn love in human nature for retailing evil of its kind. Heaven knows through whom it first chiefly spread, whether from the lips of my Lady Molyneux, who hated him and loved the telling, or through his wife and her brother, who probably supplied the *Court Talebearer*, the *St. James's Tittle-tatler*, and such like journals with the vague, yet fully damnatory, versions that appeared in them of the "Early history of a Colonel in the Queen's cavalry, well known in fashionable circles as a dilettante, a *lion*, and a leader of ton, who has recently sought the hand of the beautiful daughter of an Irish Peer, and would have led her to the altar in a few days' time, but for the unhappy, yet, considering the circumstances, fortunate discovery of the existence of a first wife, concealed by Colonel S. for the space of twenty years, during which period, it is said, the unfortunate wife has lived upon extraneous charity, denied even the ordinary necessities of existence by her unnatural husband, who, having wooed her in a passing caprice, abandoned her when one would have supposed his extreme youth might have preserved him from the barbarity, and we, the moral censors of the age, must say, however reluctantly, villainy of such a course."

How it spread I cannot say. I only know it flew like wildfire. There were so many who hated him—as a man or a woman, superior in mind, or talent, or beauty, is certain to be hated by those who cringe the lowest and court with the grossest flattery. Men who envied him his careless successes in a thousand fields, who bore him malice for some mot, dropped in the abundance of his wit, that had hit some hypocrisy or pettinesses, or owed him a grudge for that raffine exclusiveness which made him shrink from any-

thing under-bred or affected; women who had loved that beautiful face and form, and had won no admiring glance in return, or who had only awoke from him that passagere eye passion which dies so soon, and now begrudged him to another younger and fairer. He had been passionately loved—he was hated in proportion; and all his “dearest friends” glutted over the story so long hidden from their inquiring eyes. Old dowagers mumbled it over their whist-tables, married beauties whispered it behind their fans, men gossiped of it in club-rooms; and in all was the version different. Men in general—save those jealous of him for having won Violet—took his part; but women—the soft-voiced murderers of so much fair fame—sided, without exception, against him; called him villain! betrayer! all the names in their sentimental vocabulary; pitied his “poor dear wife;” doubted not she was a sweet creature sacrificed and thrown away; lamented poor darling Violet’s fate, sighed over her infatuation for one against whom they had all warned her, and agreed that such a wretch should be excluded from society! Ah me! if it were the fashion to stone the angel Gabriel—were such an individual extant—I fear me the spotlessness of his wings would not spare him one blackening blow, but rather, the purer they were, the more would men delight in swearing them black as Erebus.

“I knew it!” said Lady Molyneux, with calm satiric bitterness, and that air of superiority which people assume when they give you what Madame de Staël wisely terms that “singulière” consolation, “Je l’avais bien dit!” “I knew it—I always told you what would come of that engagement—I was always certain what that man really was. To think of my poor sweet child running such a risk, it is too terrible! If the marriage had taken place before this éclaircissement, I positively could not have visited my own daughter. Too terrible—too terrible!”

"If it had done, Helena," answered her husband, "I think you might have 'countenanced' poor Vy without disgrace. She would have been, at least, faithful to *one*, which certain stories would say, my lady, you are not always so careful to be!"

The Viscountess deigned no reply to the coarse insinuation, but covered her face in her handkerchief, only repeating :

"I knew it! I knew it all along! If *I* had had my way, Violet would now be the honored wife of one of the first Peers of the——"

"If you *did* know it, madame," interrupted Jockey Jack, sharply—"if you did know poor Sabretasche's wife was alive, it's a pity you did not tell us so. I won't have him blamed; I tell you he's a splendid fellow—a splendid fellow—and the victim of a rascally woman. He can't marry poor little Vy, of course—more fools those who make the laws!—but I won't turn my back on him. He's not the only husband who has very good motives for divorce, though the facts may not be quite clear to satisfy the courts."

With which fling at his wife, honest Jockey Jack, moved with more or less sympathy, from personal motives, for his daughter's lover, took his hat and gloves, and banged out of the house, meeting on the door-step the Hon. Lascelles Fainéant, who had received that morning in his Albany chambers a delicate missive from his virtuous Viscountess, commencing "*Ami choisi de mon cœur.*" Honest Jack Molyneux sided with Sabretasche, and told the true story wherever he went; but he did not take up the cause as hotly as De Vigne, who, moved likewise, of course, by intense sympathy for his friend's fate, so similar to his own, was filled with a passionate grief and pity for his

wrongs, generous and vehement as his nature. When he was present he would never hear Sabretasche's history discussed—it was too private, he said, and too sacred to be touched: and I remember the first day the report was buzzed about town, and a young fellow, who had been blackballed at White's by the Colonel, was beginning to sneer and to jeer at the story, whose misery and whose majesty were alike so unintelligible to him, De Vigne gave him the lie direct, his noble face flushing with righteous wrath; hurled back in his teeth the insult to his absent friend, and would have further fought him out in Wormwood Scrubbs if the man had not made him a full recantation and apology.

So the journals teemed and the coteries gossiped of that great love whose depths they could neither guess at nor understand. Sabretasche's fastidious delicacy could no longer shield him from coarse remark and prying eyes. The marriage which he considered disgrace, the love which he held as the dearest and most sacred part of his life, were the themes of London gossip, to be treated with a jeer, or, at best, with what was far more distasteful to him, pity. However, scandal and the buzz of his circle, and the ill nature of his closest friends, were alike innocuous to him now; he neither knew nor heeded them, blind and deaf to all things, save his own utter anguish and the suffering of the woman who loved him. It was piteous, they tell me, to see the change in our radiant and beautiful Violet under the first grief of her life—and such grief! She awoke from her trance that day to an anguish that was almost delirium; and such a shock from a bright and laughing future to the utter desolation of a beggared present, has before now unseated intellects not perhaps the weaker for their extreme susceptibility. From wild disconnected utterances of passionate sorrow she would

sunk into a silent, voiceless suffering, worse to witness than any tears or laments. She would lie in Sabretasche's arms, with her bright-haired head stricken to the dust for love of him, uttering low plaintive moans that entered his very soul with stabs far keener than the keenest steel; then she would cling to him, lifting her blanched face to his, praying to him never to leave her, or shrink still closer to him, praying to Heaven for mercy, and wishing she had died before she had brought sorrow on his head. It must have been a piteous sight—one to ring up from earth to Heaven to claim vengeance against the curse of laws that join hands set dead in wrath against each other, and part hearts formed for each other's joy and linked by holiest love.

It did not induce brain fever, or harm her so, belles lectrices. If we went down under every stroke in that way, as novelists assume, we should all be loved of Heaven if that love be shown by early graves, as the old Greeks say.

Violet's youth was great, her stamina good, and though, if fever had wrapped her unconscious in its embrace, it would have been happier for her, the young life flowed in her veins still purely and strongly under the dead weight that the mind bore. But for a day or so her reason seemed in danger; both were alike perilous to it—her passionate delirious agony or her mute tearless sorrow; and when her mother approached her, pouring in her commonplace sympathies, Violet gazed at her with an unconscious, bewildered look in those eyes, once so radiant with vivid intelligence, which made even Lady Molyneux shudder with a vague terror, and a consciousness of the presence of a grief far beyond her powers to cure or calm. Sabretasche alone had influence over her. With miraculous self-command and self-sacrifice, while his own heart was breaking, he calmed himself to calm her: he alone had any

power to soothe her, and he would surrender the right to none.

"You had better not see her again," her father said to him one day—"much better not, for both of you. No good can come of it, much harm may. You will not misunderstand me when I say I must put an end to your visits here. It gives me intense regret. I have not known you these past months without learning to admire and to esteem you; still, Sabretasche, you can well understand, that for poor Vy's sake——"

"Not see her again?" repeated Sabretasche, with something of his old sneering smile upon his worn, wearied, haggard features. "Are you human, Molyneux, that you say that coldly and calmly to a man whom you know, to win your daughter, would brave death and shame, heaven and hell, yet who loved her better than himself, and would not do her wrong, even to purchase the sole paradise he craves, the sole chance of joy earth will ever again offer him?"

"I know, I know," answered Jockey Jack, hastily. "You are a splendid fellow, Sabretasche. I honor you from my soul. I have told my wife so, I would tell any one so. At the same time, it is just *because*, God help you! you have such a passion for poor little Vy, that I tell you—and I mean it, too, and I think you must see it yourself—that you had far better not meet each other any more, and, indeed, I cannot, as her father, allow it——"

"No?" said Sabretasche, with a sternness and fierceness which Lord Molyneux had never imagined in his nature. "No? You side, then, my Lord Molyneux, with those who think, because misfortune has overtaken a man, he must have no mercy shown him. Listen to me! You are taking dangerous measures. I tell you that, so well does Violet love me, that I have but to say to her, 'Take

pity on me, and give yourself to me,' and I could make her leave you and her mother, her country and her friends, and follow me wherever I chose to lead her. If I exert my power over her, I believe that no authority of yours can or will keep her from me. It is not your word, nor society's dictum, that holds me back; it is solely and entirely because, young, pure hearted, devoted as she is, I will not wrong her fond trust in me, by turning it to my own desires. I will not let my own passions blind me to what is right to her. I will not woo her in her extreme youth to a path which in maturer years she may live to regret and long to retrace. I will not do it. If I have not spared any other woman in my life, I will spare her. But, at the same time, I will not be parted from her utterly; I will not be compelled to forsake her in the hour of suffering I have brought upon her. As long as she loves me I will not entirely surrender her to you or to any other man. You judge rightly; I *dare* not be with her long. God help me! I should have no strength. A field is open now to every soldier; if my troop had not been ordered out, I should have exchanged, and gone on active service. My death would be the happiest thing for her; dead, I might be forgotten and—replaced; but for our farewell, eternal as it may be, I will choose my own hour. No man shall dictate or interfere between myself and Violet, who now *ought* to be—so near to one another!"

Sternly and passionately as he had spoken, his lips quivered, his voice sank to a hoarse whisper, and he turned his head away from the gaze of his fellow-man. The honest heart of blunt, simple, obtuse Jockey Jack stirred for once into sympathy with the susceptible, sensitive, passionate nature beside him. He was silent for a moment, revolving in his mind the strange problem of this deep and tender love his daughter had awakened, musing over a character

so unlike his own, so far above any with which he had come in contact. Then he stretched out his hand with a sudden impulse :

“Have your own way, you are right enough. I put more faith in your honor than in bars and bolts. If you love Violet thus, I can’t say you shall not see her; her heart’s nigh broken as it is. God help you both! I’ll trust you with her as I would her brother!”

I think Sabretasche had pledged himself to more than he could have fulfilled. It would have been beyond the strength of man to have seen Violet’s exquisite beauty crushed to earth for his sake, her brilliant and laughing eyes heavy with tears wrung from her heart’s depths, her delicate rose-hued lips, pale and compressed over her white teeth, as if in suffering that for the love of him she denied utterance, her head, with its wealth of chestnut hair, bowed and bent with the weight of an anguish too great for her young life to bear;—to have heard her passionate bursts of sorrow, or, more pitiful still, the low moan with which she would lie for hours on the cushions of her boudoir, like a summer rose snapped off in the fury of a tempest, bewailing the loss of its fragrance and its beauty, and the fair, happy, sunny days that would never come again;—to be tortured with the touch of her soft hands clinging involuntarily to him, with her wild entreaties to him not to leave her, to let her see him every day, if he went away from her she should die! with her passionate words in calmer moments, promising eternal fidelity to him, and vowing to keep true to him, true as though she were his wife—as she had hoped to be;—it was more than the strength of man to endure all this, and keep his word so constantly in sight as never to whisper to her of possible joy, never to woo her to a forbidden future.

He *did* keep it, with iron nerve and giant self-subjection wonderful indeed in him, born in the voluptuous South, inheriting all its poetry and all its passion, and accustomed to an existence if of most refined still of most complete self-indulgence. He did keep it, though his heart would have broken—if hearts *did* break—in the agony crowded into those few brief days. Had his torture lasted longer, I doubt if he would have borne up against it; for, strong as his honor was, his love was stronger still, and he was, as his nature made him, a man of like passions with ourselves. But the English and French troops were gathering in the East; months before the Guards had tramped through London streets in the gray of the morning, with their band playing their old cheery tunes, and their Queen wishing them God speed. For several months in Woolwich Dockyards transports had been filling and ships weighing anchor, and decks crowding with line on line of troops; already through England, after a forty years' peace, the military spirit of the nation had awoken; the trumpet-call rang through the country, sounding far away through the length and breadth of the land, arousing the slumbering embers of war that had slept since Waterloo; already bitter partings were taking place in stately English homes, and by lowly farmstead hearths; and young gallant blood warmed for the strife, longing for the struggle to come, and knowing nothing of the deadly work of privation and disease, waiting, and chafing, and dying off under inaction, that was to be their doom. Ours were ordered to the Crimea with but a fortnight's time for preparation; where sharp work was to be done the Dashers were pretty sure to be in request. We were glad enough to catch a glimpse of active service and real life, after long years of dawdling in London drawing-rooms, and boring ourselves with the ennui of pleasures of which we had long tired. We had

plenty to do in the few days' notice—fresh harness, fresh horses, new rifles, and old liaisons; cases of Bass and cognac; partings with fair women; buying in camp furniture; burning the souvenirs of half a dozen seasons; the young ones thinking of Moore and Byron, the Bosphorus and veiled Haidées, we of Turkish tobacco, Syrian stallions, Miniés, and Long Enfields. We had all plenty to do, and the Crimea came to us as a good bit of fun, to take the place that year of the Western Highlands, the English open, or yachting up to Norway or through the Levant.

Heaven knows how Sabretasche broke the news to Violet, or how that young heart bore the last drop which filled her cup to overflowing. Lord Molyneux was true to his word; no strange eyes looked upon the sanctity of their grief; they had the only consolation left to them, they suffered together! Violet's first delirious madness had sunk now into a dull, mute, hopeless anguish, even still more pitiable to witness; her life, so full of brilliance and of beauty, seemed utterly stricken and broken down. She had been so used to sunshine! who could marvel that so delicate a flower, so used to cloudless skies and tropic warmth, was crushed under the first burst of the thunderstorm above her head. She tried her utmost to bear up against it, for his sake; she did her best to bear the curse of their mutual fate as well as she could, and she would give him a smile more sad than any tears, faint and wan as the pale autumn sunshine quivering on a corpse. If he had not been ordered to sail for the Crimea, I doubt if he could have kept his word to her father! From the hour she heard of his departure on foreign service, the nobler and stronger part of her character awoke, and she was worthier still of a man's whole life and love than in her bright and laughing beauty, in her deep and silent sorrow,

when for his sake she repressed the bitter utterances of despair, and, while her heart was bursting, tried, with a self-control wholly foreign to her impulsive and impetuous nature, to soothe him and to calm him under their mutual curse. Only now and then her courage broke down; then she would cling to him with a terrible brilliance in her hot dry eyes, moaning like a child delirious in pain, telling him he must not go, he would never come back to her again!

"I will not let you go," she cried; "you have made me love you, you have no right to leave me so. We may never meet again, you know, and when I am dead you cannot see me, and if you go away from me I shall die! I *cannot* live without ever seeing you. Think how long life is! I cannot bear it alone, always alone, always parted, you and I who were to be so happy. You shall *not* go!" she cried, her voice changing from a strangely dull and dreamy hopelessness into the wildness of despair. "You shall *not* go, they will keep you away from me, they will never let you see your poor Violet again, they will kill you in that cruel war! I will not let you go; you have a right to listen to me. I love you more dearly than any other woman ever did on earth!"

"Oh, Heaven!—hush!" cried Sabretasche, while the hands that clasped on hers trembled like a woman's. "Dear as your words are to me, do not speak them, if you would not drive me to madness. While you love me I will never utterly give you up. No power on earth shall condemn us all our lives to that absence which makes life worse than death, cursed with the desolation, but not blessed with the unconsciousness of the grave. But I *dare* not look at our future; as yet there is nothing for us but to suffer! My honor every way—as a soldier, as a man—bind me to leave you now. I stand pledged to take

my part in this Crimean campaign. For you I should break my word, for the first time in all my life—for Heaven's sake, my own love, do not tempt me——”

His voice sank into a hoarse, inarticulate murmur; and even while he bade her not to tempt him, he looked down into her eyes, whose brilliance was quenched in such bitter anguish, and pressed his lips on hers whose beauty lured him with such resistless strength. The sight of her up-raised face, the mocking vision of all that he had lost, the struggle in his own heart of love and honor, utterly unmanned him; his chest rose and fell with uncontrollable sobs; and large tears forced themselves from his burning eyes as he bowed his head upon his hands, convulsed with the emotion he had no power to subdue. Trembling and terrified at the grief, whose vehemence she could not soothe, since every fond word she uttered was but fuel to the flame, Violet knelt down beside him—roused out of her own almost delirious sorrow, to the innate unselfishness and heroism which lay in her heart, though her gay and careless life, joyous and thoughtless as a girl's could be, had never called them into play.

“Vivian, my darling,” she whispered, leaning her head against him, and clasping her fingers round his wrist to try and draw away one hand from his face, “you shall never hear another word from me to dissuade you from what you hold your duty as a soldier. You have never stained your honor yet; you shall not tarnish it for me! Go, since you must. I will try to bear it; though we are parted, my heart will not break while you still love me. Ours is no summer-day love to shake with every breath. Did we not promise to love one another, not for a day, not for a year, but for as long as our lives should last? and while we love, Vivian, we cannot be wholly parted. Heaven knows, that what we suffer is bitter as death; but suffering for you is

dearer to me than every joy that earth could give me with another. If I may not be your wife, I will be truer to you while my life lasts than ever any wife was to her husband. You need no vows, dearest, to tell you I shall be faithful!"

He did not answer, save with a sigh from his heart's depths, and, overwhelmed with the sight of the passionate grief she had no power to still, and to which she had no hope to offer, Violet bowed her head upon his arm, mingling in silent anguish her tears with his :

"God help us! what have we done to be forced to live apart—doomed to suffer like this?"

Sabretasche started violently at her piteous words, and sprang to his feet, his face pale as death, and his heart throbbing to suffocation. He clasped her in his arms and kissed her, more passionately than, as her affianced husband, he had ever done even in their sweet meetings and partings during their engagement, even on that night when she first pledged herself to be his wife.

"Heaven guard you!—I dare stay no longer!—Be true to me if you would save me from madness," he murmured.—And he had left her before she could say one word to detain him.

I think his word to Lord Molyneux was very nearly being broken that day. If it had been, I think the blame would scarcely have rested upon Sabretasche more than upon the slave who, with the curse of iron fetters upon him, rebels against unnatural laws, and tries to struggle from the bondage which robs him of the sole thing that makes life of value—Liberty.

II.

HOW A WOMAN MADE FEUD BETWEEN PALAMON AND AR-
CITE, AND PASSION AWOKE TENFOLD STRONGER FOR ITS
REST.

"COLONEL BRANDLING wishes to speak to you, Major," said his man to De Vigne, one morning when Granville was dressing, after exercising his troop up at Wormwood Scrubbs.

"Colonel Brandling? Ask him if he'd mind coming up to me here, if he's in a hurry," answered De Vigne going on brushing his whiskers. He did not bear Curly the greatest good-will since seeing him under the chestnut-trees at St. Crucis—where, by the way, he himself had not been since.

"May I come in, old fellow?" asked Curly's voice at the door.

"Certainly. Entrez!"

Curly came in accordingly, but not with his quick step and his gay voice; the one usually no heavier, the other not one whit less joyous, than in his boyish days at Frestonhills.

"You are an early visitor, Curly," said De Vigne, rather curtly. "I thought you'd prefer coming up here instead of waiting ten minutes while I washed my hands and put myself en bourgeois."

"Yes, I have come early," began Curly, so abstractedly that De Vigne swung round, looked at him, and noticed with astonishment that his light-hearted Frestonhills pet seemed strangely down in the mouth. Curly was distract and absent; he looked worried, and there were dark circles beneath his eyes as of a man who has passed the night tossing on his bed to painful thoughts.

"What's the matter, Curly?" asked De Vigne. "Has Heliotrope gone lame, Lord Ormolu turned crusty, Eudoxie Lemaire deserted you, or what is it?"

Curly smiled, but very sadly.

"Nothing new; I have made a fool of myself, that's all."

"And are come to me for auricular confession? What is the matter, Curly?" asked De Vigne, his anger vanishing at once, and his interest awakening; for he had had a real and cordial affection for Curly ever since he had championed and petted the boy at Frestonhills.

"Imprimis, I have asked a woman to be my wife," answered Curly, with a nervous laugh, playing with the bouquet bottles on the table.

De Vigne started perceptibly; he looked up with a rapid glance of interrogation, but he did not speak, except a rather haughty and impatient "Indeed!"

Curly did not notice his manner, he was too ill at ease, too thoroughly absorbed in his own thoughts, too entirely at a loss, for the first time in his life, how to express what he wanted to say. Curly had often come to De Vigne with the embarrassments and difficulties of his life; when he had dropped more over the Oaks than he knew exactly how to pay, or entangled himself where a tigress grip held him tighter than he relished; but there are other things that a man cannot so readily say to another, and I have often noticed that the deeper any feelings are, or the more they do him honor, the more reluctant is he to drag them into daylight and hold them up for show.

"Well?" said De Vigne, impatient at his silence, and more anxious, perhaps, than he would have allowed to hear the end of these confessions. "Certainly the step shows no great wisdom; but marriages are general enough and you have wiser men than either you or I,

sharers in the hallucination. Who has bewitched you into it?"

"You can guess, I should say."

"Not I; I am no *Œdipus*; and of all riddles, men's folly with women is the hardest to be read."

"Yet you might. Who can be with her and resist her——"

"Her?—who? Speak intelligibly, *Curly*," said *De Vigne*, irritably. "Remember your lover's raptures are Arabic to me."

"In a word, then," said *Curly*, hurriedly, "I love *Alma Tressillian*, and I have told her so."

De Vigne's eyebrows contracted, his lips turned pale, and he set them into a hard straight line, as I have seen him when suffering severe physical pain.

"She has accepted you, of course?"

Had *Curly* been less preoccupied, he must have thought how huskily and coldly the question was spoken.

Curly shook his head.

"No?" exclaimed *De Vigne*, his eyes lighting up from their haughty impassibility into passionate eagerness.

"No! Plenty of women have loved me, too; yet when I am more in earnest than I ever was, I can awaken no response. I love her very dearly, Heaven knows, as truly and as tenderly as man can love woman. I would give her my name, my rank, my riches, were they a thousand times greater than they are; and if I were a poor man I would work for her night and day, and think no poverty sad, no travail hard, if it were only for her sake. Good Heavens! it seems very bitter that love like mine should count for nothing, when other men, only seeking to gratify their passions or gain their own selfish ends, win all before them."

His voice trembled as he spoke; his gay and careless

spirits were beaten down; for the first time in his bright butterfly life Sorrow had come upon him. Its touch is death, and its breath the chill air of the charnel-house, even when we have had it by us waking and sleeping, in our bed and at our board, peopling our solitude and poisoning our Falernian, rising with the morning sun and with the evening stars;—how much heavier then must be the iron hand, how much more chill its breath, ice cold as the air of a grave, to one who has never known its presence!

Wer nie sein Brod mit Tränen ass,
Wer nicht die kummervollen Nächte.
Auf seinem Bette weinend sass
Der kent euch nicht ihr himlischen Mächte.

Curly's voice trembled; he leaned his arm on the dressing-table, and his head upon his hand; his rejection had cut him more keenly to the heart than he cared another man should see. De Vigne stood still, an eager gladness in his eyes, a faint flush of color on the marble-like pallor of his face, his heart beating freely and his pulses throbbing quickly; that vehement and exultant joy of which his nature was capable stirred in him at the thought of Curly's rejection. We never know how we value a thing till its loss is threatened!

He did not answer for some moments; then he laid his hand on Curly's shoulder with that old gentleness he had always used to his old Frestonhills favorite.

"Dear old fellow, it *is* hard. I am very——"

He stopped abruptly; he would have added, "sorry for you," but De Vigne knew that he was *not* sorry in his heart, and the innate truth that was in the man checked the lie that conventionality would have pardoned.

Curly threw off his hand and started to his feet. Something in De Vigne's tone struck on his lover's keen senses

with a suspicion that before had never crossed him, absorbed as he had been in his own love for the Little Tressillian, and his own hopes and fears for his favor in her eyes.

"Spare yourself the falsehood," he said, coldly, as *he* had never spoken before to his idolized "senior pupil." "Commiseration from a rival is simply insult."

"A rival?" repeated De Vigne, that fiery blood of his always ready—too ready, at times—to rise up in anger, even when not "just," as Mr. Tupper exacts.

"Yes, and a successful one, perhaps," said Curly as hotly, for at the sting of jealousy the sweetest temper can turn into hate. "You could not say, on your honor, De Vigne, that my rejection by her gives you pain. If you did your face would belie you. You love her as well as I; you are jealous over her; perhaps you know that she returns it; perhaps you have already taken advantage of her youth and her ignorance of the world and her trust in you, to sacrifice her to your own inconstant passions——"

"Silence!" said De Vigne, fiercely. "No other man would I allow to say such words unpunished. Your very supposition is an insult to my honor."

"Do you care nothing for her, then?" interrupted Curly. His heart was set on the Little Tressillian. He believed his rival stood before him, and in such moods men cast reason, temperance, old friendship, to the winds.

The dark passionate blood of his race rose over De Vigne's forehead; his eyes lighted; he looked like a lion longing to spring upon his foe. *He* to have his heart probed rudely like this—to endure to have his dearest secrets dragged to daylight by this boy's hands—*he* to be questioned, counseled, arraigned in accusation by another man! Curly had forgotten his character, or he would have hardly thought to gain his secret by provocation and

condemnation. De Vigne restrained his anger only by a mighty effort of will, and he threw back his hand with that haughty gesture and that scornful impatient smile on his delicately cut lips, habitually expressive with him of contemptuous irritation.

“If you came here to cross-question me, you were singularly unwise. I am not very likely to be patient under such treatment. Whatever my feelings might be on any subject of the kind, do you suppose it is probable I should confide them to you?”

So haughtily careless was his tone, that Curly, catching at straws as men in love will do, began to hope that De Vigne, cold and cynical as he had been to women ever since his fatal marriage, might, after all, be indifferent to his protégée.

“If it be an insult to your honor, then,” he said, eagerly, “to hint that you love her, or think of her otherwise than as a sister, you can have no objection to do for me what I came to ask of you.”

“What is that?” asked De Vigne, coldly. He could not forgive Curly any of his words; if he resented the accusation of loving Alma, because it struck harshly on what he was always very tenacious over—his confidence and his private feelings—and startled him into consciousness of what he had been unwilling to admit to himself, he resented still more the supposition that he cared for Alma as a sister, since it involved the deduction that she might love him—as a brother! And that fraternal calmness of affection ill chimed in with an impetuous nature that knew few shades between hate and love, between profound indifference or entire possession!

“Alma rejected me!” answered poor Curly; all the unconscious dignity of sorrow was lent to his still girlish and Greek-like beauty, and a sadness strangely calm and

deep for his gay insouciant character had settled in his laughing blue eyes. "I offered her what few men would have thought it necessary to offer her, unprotected as she is—my name and my rank, such as they are; and had I owned the dignities of an empire, I would have raised her to my throne, and thought she graced it. I offered her all that a man can, his tenderness, his fidelity, his protection. I told her how I loved her, and—God help me!—that is very dearly. Yet she rejected me, though gently and tenderly, for she has nothing harsh in her. But sometimes we know a woman's refusal is not positive; it may come from girlish indecision, caprice, want of thought, waywardness, timidity, a hundred things, which afterward they may repent, when they remember how rare to find true love is in the world. I thought that perhaps (you have great influence over her as her grandfather's friend) you could put this before her; persuade her at the least not to deny me all hope; plead my cause with her; ask her to let me wait,—if it were even as long as Jacob for Rachel, I would bear it. I would try to be more worthy of her, to make her fonder of me. I would shake off the idleness and uselessness of my present life. I would gain a name that would do her honor. I would do anything, everything, if *only* she would give me hope!"

He spoke fervently and earnestly; pale as death with the love that brought no joy upon its wings; his slender fair hands clinched in the misery to which he gave no utterance; his delicate girlish face stamped pitifully with anguish of uncontrollable anxiety, yet with a new nobility from the chivalric honor and high devotedness which Alma had awakened in him.

He was silent—and De Vigne as well. De Vigne leaned against one of the windows of his bed-room, his face turned away from Curly, and his eyes fixed on the gay street

below. He was as pale as his rival, and he breathed shortly and fast. Curly's words stirred him strangely: perhaps they revealed his own heart to him; perhaps they, in their earnestness and unselfishness, contrasted with such love as he had always known; perhaps they stung him with the thought, how much better sheltered from the storms of passion and the chill blasts of the world in Curly's bosom, than in his own, would be this fragile and soft-winged little dove, now coveted by both.

He did not answer; Curly repeated his question in low tones.

"De Vigne! will you do it? Will you plead my cause with her? If she be so little to you it will cost you nothing!"

Again he did not answer, the question struck too closely home. It woke up in all its force the passion which had before slumbered in some unconsciousness. When asked to give her to another, he learned how dear she was to himself. Hot and jealous by nature as a Southern, how could *he*, though he might be generous and just, plead with her to give the joys to his rival of which a cruel fate had robbed him? how could *he* give the woman he would win for himself, away to the arms of another?

"Answer me, De Vigne. Yes or no?"

"No!"

And haughtily calm as the response was, in his heart went up a bitter cry, "*God help me. I cannot!*"

"Then you love her, and have lied!"

De Vigne sprang forward like a tiger at the hiss of the murderous and cowardly bullet that has roused him from his lair; the fire of just anger now burned in his dark eyes, and his teeth were set like a man who holds his vengeance with difficulty in check. Involuntarily he lifted his right arm; another man he would have struck down at his feet for that dastard word. But with an effort—how

great only those who knew his nature could appreciate—he held his anger in, as he would have held a chafing and fiery steed with iron hand upon its reins; and he lifted his grand head with a noble and knightly air:

“Your love has maddened you, or you would scarcely have dared to use that word to me. If I did not pity you, and if I had not liked you since you were a little fair-faced boy, I should make you answer for that insult in other ways than speech. If I *were* to love any woman, what right have you to dictate to me my actions or dispute my will? You might know of old that I suffer from no man’s interference with me and mine.”

“I have no power to dispute your will,” interrupted Curly, “nor to arrest your actions. Would to Heaven I had! But as a man who loves her truly and honorably himself, I will tell you, whether I have right or no, that no prevarication on your part hides from me that you at least share my madness; and I will tell you, too, though you slew me for it to-morrow, that she is too fond, too true, too pure to be made the plaything of your fickle passions, and cast off when you are weary of her face and seek a newer mistress. I will tell you that the man who wrongs her trust in him, and betrays her guileless frankness, will carry a sin in his bosom greater than Cain’s fratricide; and I will tell you that, if you go on as you have done from day to day, concealing your marriage, yet knitting her heart to yours—if you do not at once reveal your history to her, and leave her free to act for herself, to love you or to leave you, to save herself from you or to sacrifice herself for you, as she please, that for all your unstained name and unsuspected honor, *I* shall call you a coward!”

“My God!” muttered De Vigne, “that I should live to hear another man speak such words to me. I wonder I do not kill you where you stand!”

I wonder, too, he kept down his wrath even to the point he did, for De Vigne's nature had no trace of the lamb in it, and to attack his honor was a worse crime than to attack his life. His lips grew white, his eyes black as night, and literally lurid with flame; he pressed his hand upon his heart—the old gesture he had used in the church at Vigne upon his marriage-day. Curly stood opposite to him, slight and fair as the Slayer of the Python, a deep flush on his delicate cheeks, and dark circles under his clear blue eyes. Deadly passion was between those two men then, sweeping away all ancient memories of boyish days, all gentler touches of brighter hours and kinder communion. The fatal love of woman had come between, cut down, supplanted, and destroyed the friendship of the men. Their eyes met—fierce, steady, full of fire, and love, and hate; De Vigne's hand clinched harder on his breast, and with the other he signed him to the door. The wildest passions were at war within him; his instinct thirsted to revenge the first insult he had ever known, yet his kingly soul, at the daring that defied him, yielded something like that knightly admiration with which the Thirty looked upon the Thirty when the sun went down on Carnac.

“Go—go! I honor you for your defense of her, but such words as have passed between us no blood can wash out, nor after words efface!”

Curly bent his head and left him; he had done all he could. When they met again——! Ah! God knows if our meetings were foreseen many voices would be softer, many farewells warmer, many lips that smile would quiver, many eyes that laugh would linger long with salt tears in them, many hands would never quit their clasp that touch another with light careless grasp, at partings where no prescience warns, no second-sight can guide!

Curly left him, and De Vigne threw himself into an

arm-chair, all the fiery thoughts roused in him beating like the strong pinions of chained eagles. The passions which had already cost him so much, and which from his fatal marriage-day he had vowed should never regain their Circean hold upon him, were now let loose, and rioted in his heart. He knew that he loved Alma, as he had sworn to himself never to love woman. He knew that, strong in his own strength, he had gone down before her; that the honor and the pride on which he had piqued himself had been futile to save him from the danger which he had so scornfully derided and recklessly provoked; that his own iron will, on which he had so fearlessly relied, had been powerless to hold him back from the old intoxication, whose fiery draught had poisoned him even in its sweetness, and to whose delirium he had vowed never again to succumb. He loved Alma passionately, madly, as he always had loved, as he always would love, yet with a tenfold force and fascination from the vehemence of his nature, which had intensified with his maturer manhood; and from the fervor, the truth, the warmth, the delicacy of her unusual and winning character—a character which offered so marked a contrast to the women he had wooed before her, where he found no mean between impudence and prudery, boldness or affectation; where either coarseness courted him, or else mock-modesty chilled him; with whom he found passion either a dead letter, or else distorted into vice; and in whom he saw no virtue save such as was a cover to hideous sins, or dictated by cold prudence and conventional selfishness, and a wise regard to their own social interests.

He loved her, and De Vigne was not a man cold enough, or, as the world would phrase it, virtuous enough, to say to the woman he idolized, “Flee from me—society will not smile upon our love!” Yet his knowledge that there had

arisen between them that "lovely and fearful thing" grafted in us by nature and inherited with life; that love which, blessed, gives "greenness to the grass and glory to the flower," and, cursed, blights all creation with its breath; came to him with bitter thoughts more like the heritage of woe than joy. Many of Curly's words had struck into his brain with marks of fire. "Going on as you have done day by day, deceiving her by concealment of your marriage, yet knitting her heart to yours!" These stung him cruelly, for, of all things, De Vigne abhorred concealment or cowardice; of all men he was most punctilious in his ideas of truth and honor, and his conscience told him that had he acted straightforwardly, or, for her, wisely, he would have let Alma know, in the earliest days of their intimacy, of the cruel ties of church and laws that fettered him with so uncongenial and so unmerited a chain. True, he had never concealed it from bad motives; it was solely his disgust at every thought of the Trefusis, and the semi-oblivion into which—never seeing his wife to remind him of it—the bare fact of his so-called marriage had sunk, which had prevented his revealing it to Alma. He had never thought the matter would be of consequence to her; he had looked on her as a mere acquaintance, and it had no more occurred to him to tell her his history than it had done to talk it over in the clubs. You must know by this time as well as I that De Vigne was as reserved as he was impatient of all meddling with his concerns; still, that imputation of want of candor, of lacking to a young girl the honor he had been ever so scrupulous in yielding to men, stung him to the quick. Other words, too, lingered on his mind, bringing with them that keen, sharp pain, that stifling, agonized longing for certainty, like the parched thirst for water in a desert, that fastens on us with the doubt of our love being fully answered. "If you only

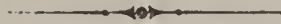
think of her as a sister," chilled him with a breath of ice: for the first time it suggested to him that Alma, frank, fond, demonstrative as she was to him, might also think of him as—a brother. She was always gay and candid with him; she always showed him without disguise her delight in his presence, her grief at his absence; she said everything to him that entered her mind, and spoke out of her heart to him fearlessly and lovingly. There was none of the orthodox timidity, reserve, and blushing confusion popularly and poetically associated with the dawn of love—signs such as De Vigne had seen, either natural or affected, in most women. Perhaps Alma's frankness and fondness were too demonstrative to be deep; perhaps the affection she felt for him was the gay, grateful affection of a young girl for a man who had been her kindest friend and most congenial companion, not the ardent and impassioned love of which he knew, by her eyes and her character, Alma would some day be capable. The doubt was to him like the bitterness of death. It *should* not have been, we know, had he been unselfish as he ought; he *should* have prayed for punishment to fall upon his head, and for her to be spared the fruits of his own imprudence; but what man among us can put his hand upon his heart, and say before God that he could have summoned up such unselfishness under such a temptation? Not I—not you—not Granville De Vigne, for, as Sabretasche would have said, we are unhappily mortal, mon ami!

The doubt was as the bitterness of death, yet he knew that for her sake he ought to wish that the doubt might be solved against him. Heaven knows, he suffered enough in that hell of thought, whose tortures far excel the material hell of Milton or of Dante! Remorse for his own obstinacy of will, which would see no danger for himself in his careless intercourse with an attractive woman whom he per-

sisted in regarding as a winning child;—regret for his defalcation in that straightforward honor and uncompromising truth which had been his guiding star and idol through all his life;—agony at the memory of that mad marriage which now deprived him of his right of liberty and free action through the fetters flung over him by an arch-intrigante, whose crime was upheld by an illiberal church and cruel laws;—dread anxiety to know whether or not Alma Tressillian loved him, though how that love might end for both he never paused to ask;—all these made a tempest in his heart fiercer even than that which had raged there on the fatal day whose after-consequences had chained his hands and ruined his manhood.

One resolution he made amid the whirl of thoughts and feelings which the stormy scene with Curly had so unexpectedly called into life—that was to tell her of his marriage at once, or, rather, (for marriage it was not,) of the false system of society and the iron fetters of a tie which could be as nothing in the eyes of reason and justice, which now held him back from the only *true* marriage—where love secures fidelity and heart weds heart—rare enough, God knows!—too rare to be forbidden by man to man! He resolved to tell her, fiery as his struggle was with himself; for the name of The Trefusis was hateful to him to breathe, even to those who knew his history. Perhaps there mingled with it some thought that by Alma's reception of it he would see how little or how much she cared for him. I know not; if there were, I dare throw no stone at him. How many of my motives—how many of yours—of any man's, are unmixed and undefiled? He resolved to tell her, to be cold and guarded with her, to let her see no sign or shadow of the passion she had awakened. All his past warnings had failed to teach him wisdom; he still trusted in his own strength, still believed his will

powerful enough to hold his love down without word or token of it, while it gnawed at his heart-strings in the very presence of the woman who had awakened it! Once more Granville De Vigne had gone down before his old foe and siren, Passion; like Sisera before the treacherous wife of Heber the Kenite, at her feet he bowed and fell—and in that strange delirium men “know not what they do!”



PART THE EIGHTEENTH.

I.

THE ORDEAL BY FIRE.

THE summer day was beautifully soft and sultry as he rode down the road to Richmond. A thunder-storm in the early morning had purified but not chilled the air; the roads were sparkling still with moisture; the grasses, heavy with dew, glittered like emeralds in the sunlight; the little birds were twittering and singing in sweet abrupt gushes and trills of impromptu music; the deer in the park lifted their head now and then for a clear bell of delight, and trooped with stately grace along the scented turf into the shadows of the trees, which moved their glistening leaves at the low summer wind, as it shook off from their luxuriant foliage noiseless showers of rain drops, that fell with silent foot-falls on the fern branches below.

There was the glorious beauty of the “glad summer-time” in the fragrant air, and on the moistened roads, and on the rich sylvan breath of the green woodlands, but it never reached his eyes, or heart, or senses, deeply as at

another time it would have stirred his inborn love of nature, as De Vigne rode on, spurring his horse into a mad gallop, with that one world within him which blinds a man to all the rest of earth. He galloped on and on, never slackening his pace; for the first time in all his soldier's life he felt *dread*—dread of telling the woman he loved that he was tied to the woman he hated; *not* for the first time, yet quicker than ever before, his pulse throbbed, and his heart beat loudly and rapidly, at the thought of the Little Tresillian. They throbbed much faster, and beat much quicker still, as he came in sight of the farm-house of St. Crucis, and saw coming out of the little gate, and taking his horse's bridle off the post—Vane Castleton.

“Good Heavens!” thought De Vigne, with a deadly anguish tightening at his heart, “is she, then, like the rest? Has she duped us all? Is her guileless frankness as great a lie as other women's artifice?”

Castleton did not see him; he threw himself across his bay and rode down the opposite road. De Vigne wavered a moment; skeptical as he was, he was almost ready to turn his horse's head and leave her, never to see her again. If she chose Vane Castleton, let him have her! But love conquered; the girl's face had grown too dear to him for him of his own act never to look upon it again. He flung his bridle over the gate, pushed the little wicket open, and entered the garden. In the window, with her eyes lifted upward to a lark singing far above in the blue ether, the chestnut-boughs hanging over her in their dark-green framework, the honey-suckles and china roses bending down till they touched her shining golden hair, her cheeks a little flushed, and on her young face all that vivid intelligence, refined delicacy, and impassionate feeling which formed her strongest, because her rarest, charm for him, was Little Alma. At the sight of her, he trembled like a

woman, with the passion that had grown silently up, and ripened into such sudden force from the night of the Molyneux ball. How *could* he give her up to any living man? Right or wrong, how could he so tame down his inborn nature as to wish to win from such a woman only the calm, chill affection of a sister?

That mad jealousy which almost always accompanies strong love, especially when that love is uncertain of having awakened any response, and which had awoke in all its fire at the sight of Vane Castleton, and the suspicion that it was for Castleton's sake and not for his own that she had rejected Curly's suit, drove all memory of The Trefusis, all recollection of what he came to avow to Alma, from his mind!

He stood and looked at her—the wild throbbing of his heart, the rush of all that inexpressible delirium, half rapture and half suffering, which, for long years, none of her sex had had the power to rouse in him, told him that he should not dare to trust himself in her presence, for no will, however strong, could have strength enough to tame its fever down and chill his veins into ice-water. Still he lingered, not master of himself; the unnatural calmness, the acquired self-control with which he had of late banished, and, as he believed, silenced forever those warmer and fonder impulses that had been born with him, were lost. The man's nature, alive and vigorous, rebelled against the stoicism he had thought to graft upon it, and flung off the cold and alien bonds of the chill philosophy circumstances had taught him to adopt. His heart was made for the passionate joys of love; and against the reason of his mind it demanded its rights and clamored for his freedom. He lingered there, loth—who can marvel?—to close upon himself the golden gates of a fuller, sweeter, more glorious existence; and turn away to bear an unmerited curse

alone—a wanderer from that Eden which was his right and heritage as a man. He lingered—then she looked up and saw him, her lips parted with a low, glad cry, the rose flush deepened in her cheeks, the first blush she had ever given for him. She sprang down from the window, which was scarcely a foot above the ground, ran across the lawn as lightly as a fawn, and stood by his side.

“Oh, Sir Folko ! how long you have been away !”

How could he leave her then ? If he could have done, I fancy he would have been one of the impossible creations of romance, pulseless and bloodless as marble gods—not one of the warm, impulsive, erring sons of earth, a man, as I say, of like passions with ourselves.

She came and stood by him ; her golden hair nearly touching his arm, her little soft fingers still on his hand, her glad beaming face turned up to his with the full glow of the afternoon sunshine upon it, her eyes raised with joyous tenderness in their clear regard, yet far down in their dark-blue depths, that enthusiasm, sensitiveness, and intensity of feeling of which the heart that shone through them was capable. She stood by him, only thinking of her happiness at seeing him, never dreaming of the torture her presence was to him—a torment yet an ecstacy, like the exultation and the awakening of an opium-smoker combined in one. Seeing her thus, with her hand in his, her eyes looking upward to him, so near to her that he could count every breath that parted her soft warm lips, it was hard for him to keep stern and cold to her, repress the words that hung upon his lips, chain down the impulse that rose in him, with irresistible longing, to take her to his heart and carry her far away where no man could touch her, and no false laws deny him the love that was his common birthright among men.

“What a long time you have been away, Sir Folko !”

began Alma again. "Ten whole days! You have never been to see me since that beautiful ball. I thought you were sure to come the next day, or the day after, at latest. Have you been out of town?"

"Oh no!" said De Vigne, moving toward the house without looking at her.

"Then why have you been so long?"

"I have been engaged, and you have had plenty of other visitors," he answered, his jealousy of Vane Castleton working up into a bitterness he could not wholly conceal.

She colored. Looking aside at her, he saw the flush in her cheeks. She had never looked confused before at any words of his, and he put it down, not to his own abruptness, but to the memory of his rival.

"No visitors whom I care for," said Alma, with that pretty petulance which became her so well. "I have told you till I am tired of telling you that nobody makes up, or ever could make up, to me for your absence!"

How his heart glowed at her reply! But the devil of jealousy was not lulled so easily, wayward as he always had been from his cradle, and suspicious as his life now had made him.

"Still, when I am absent," he said, with that satire which with him was often a veil to very deep feeling, "you can console yourself very agreeably with other men."

They had now passed into her room. He leant against the side of the window, playing impatiently with sprays of the honey-suckle and clematis that hung round it, snapping the sprays and throwing the fragrant flowers recklessly on the grass outside the sill, careless of the ruin of beauty he was causing. She stood opposite to him, stroking the parrot's scarlet crest unconsciously—she and her bird making a brilliant picture.

His words touched her into something like his own

mingled anger and satire, for their natures had certain touches in common, as all natures have that assimilate and sympathize; and Alma's temper, though very sweet, could be passionate at provocation or injustice.

"If I thought so," she answered, quickly, "I should not honor the woman I suspected of such falsehood and such variability by any visits at all from me, were I you."

"Is that a hint to me to leave your new friend Castleton the monopoly?" asked De Vigne, between his teeth.

"Sir Folko!"

That was all she deigned to answer—her eyes flashing fire in their dark-blue depths, her cheeks hot as the crimson roses above her head, her expressive lips full of tremulous indignation, her attitude, all fire and grace and outraged pride, said the rest. There was fascination about her then sufficient to madden any man who loved her.

"Would you try to make me believe, then, that you do not know that man Castleton loves you—what he calls love, at least?" asked De Vigne, fiercely.

Alma's cheeks glowed to a warmer crimson still, and resentment at his tone flashed from under her black lashes, like azure lightning. He had put *her* passions up now.

"You must be mad to speak to me in that tone. I bear no imputation of a falsehood even from you. I do not suppose Lord Vane loves me, as you phrase it. From the little I know of him, I should fancy him infinitely too vain and too egotistical to love any woman whatsoever. That he flatters me, and would talk more foolish nonsense still, I know; but that is scarcely to my taste, as you, I should have thought, might have believed, and——"

"You will be very unwise if you give ear or weight to his 'foolish nonsense;' many a girl as young and as fair as you have been ruined by listening to it," interrupted De Vigne, without waiting for her explanation. He was so

mad that Vane Castleton should even have dreamt that he would win her; he was so rife with passions wild and reckless, that, rather than stand calmly by the girl, he must upbraid her; and the storm that was in his heart found vent in cruel and sarcastic words, being denied the softer and natural outlet of love, vows and fond caresses. The love that murdered Desdemona, and condemned Heloïse to a living death, is not dead in the world yet. "Vane Castleton *can* love, not as you idealize it, perhaps, but as he holds it. There is no man so brutal, so heartless, or so egotistical, but can love—as he translates the word, at least—for his own private ends or selfish gratification. 'Love' is men's amusement, like horse-racing, or gaming, or drinking, and you would not find that 'bad men' abstain from it—rather the contrary, I am afraid! Vane Castleton will love you, I dare say, if you let him, very dearly—for a month or two!"

How bitterly he spoke, holding his hand upon his chest, and breathing hard, as he looked away from her out into the glad summer sunshine, lying so sweetly and brightly upon the turf and on the chestnut-boughs.

Alma gazed at him, her large eyes wide open, like a startled gazelle's, her cheeks crimson with the blush his manner and his subject awoke.

"Sir Folko, what has come to you? *Are you mad?*"

"Perhaps," said De Vigne, between his teeth—set, as he would set them in the wild work of a charge or a skirmish. "All I say is, that you are unwise to receive Castleton's visits and listen to his flattering compliments. Many women have rued them. I can tell you that men very unscrupulous in such affairs, the last to condemn, the first to give license and latitude, have called him Butcher, for his gross brutality—sleek and soft as he looks—to a girl no older than yourself, whose boy brother he shot dead through

the heart. You would have been wiser to have taken Curly's honest affection; there are few honest hearts upon earth, and *there* the world would have gone with you, society would have smiled on your love, and prudence and propriety and wisdom upheld you in your choice——"

"Sir Folko! What right have you to speak to me like this?" interrupted Alma, with a passionate gesture. "What right have you to suppose that I should listen to Vane Castleton, or any other man? If you had listened to me you would have heard that his fulsome compliments are detestable to me, and that I hate them and loathe them, that I told him so this very afternoon, and that I shall have strangely mistaken him if ever he repeats his visits here again. How could you, knowing me as you do, or as you ought to do, presume to doubt that I could find pleasure in flattery that I, at least, think no compliment? Still more, how could you dream that I, having seen you, could tolerate him, or any other man? Do you think that society and prudence weigh with me? Do you suppose that love I could not return would have any temptation for me, even where it is as true and generous as I believe Colonel Brandling's to be? Do you think that I could endure the iron bondage of marriage with a man for whom I cared nothing, however it might be gilded over with the glare of rank and riches and position? What harm have you heard of me to make you all at once class me with the women you satirize and ridicule? Would you wish to give me over to your friend? Would you think so meanly of me as to——Oh, Sir Folko, Heaven forgive you!"

She stood beside him passionate as a little Pythoness, with all the fervor of her moiety of Italian nature awoke and aroused; her cheeks crimson with her indignation, her grief, and her vehemence, her lips just parted with their rush of words, her head thrown back in defiance, her little

white hands clinched together, yet on her face a very anguish of pain, and in her large brilliant eyes inexpressible tenderness, reproach, and wistful agony. Her gaze was fixed upon him even while her heart heaved with the fresh and vehement burst of new emotions his words had aroused; and tears, passionate and bitter, rose in her throat and gathered in her eyes—those tears of blood, the tears of woman's love. All his passion surged up in De Vigne's heart with resistless force; all that burning love for her which had crept into his heart with such insidious stealth, and burst into such sudden flame but a few hours before, mastered and conquered him. In all her strange and brilliant fascination, in all her fond and childlike frankness, in all her newly-dawned and impassioned tenderness she stood before him; his heart throbbed wildly; the hot blood mounted to his pallid brow in the fierceness of the struggle, the olden delirium fastened on him with more intoxication than ever in days gone by, even in that for whose price he had paid down his name, his honor, and his freedom. Will, power, reason, self-control were shivered to the winds; he was no statue of clay, no sculptured god of stone, to resist such fierce temptation—to pass over and reject all for which nature, and manhood, and tenderness pleaded—to put away with unshaken hand the love for which every fiber of his being yearned.

She stood before him in all her witchery of womanhood, and before her De Vigne's strength bowed down and fell; the love within him wrestled with and overthrew him; every nerve of his nature thrilled and throbbed, every vein seemed turned to fire; he seized her in his arms where she stood, he crushed her slight form against his heart in an embrace long and close enough for a farewell, while he covered her flushed cheeks and soft warm lips with "lava kisses melting while they burned." He needed no words to tell he

was loved; between them now there was an eloquence compared to which all speech is dumb.

The glowing golden sunlight shone on them where they stood, two human beings formed for each other's joy. To those who condemn him, all I answer is, "Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder!" God and nature had joined their hearts together in the higher bonds of love, enduring and eternal; it was man's meddling and pharisaic laws which dared to decree they should be put asunder.

Those moments of deep rapture passed uncounted by De Vigne, conscious only of that ecstasy of which he had been robbed so long, which was to his heart as the flowing of water-springs through a dry land; all the outer world was forgotten by him, all his unnatural and cruel ties faded from his memory, all he knew was that once more he was loved on this weary life—so weary without love; all he felt was the wild pulsations of the heart he held imprisoned against his own, whose throbs were all for him; all he remembered was that he loved and was loved! Holding her still in his arms he leaned against the side of the window, the soft summer wind fanning their brows, flushed with their mutual joy; his passion spending itself in broken sighs and deep delight, and hurried words and fond caresses.

"You love me, Alma?" he whispered eagerly, bending his haughty head to look into the eyes whose loving radiance answered him without words.

"Forever!" she murmured, as fervently, looking up into his face, while warm blushes tinged her cheeks and brow. "How could I help but love you in joy or in sorrow, in death or in life; you, the realization of all my best ideals; you, to whom I owe all the happiness of my being; you, who have haunted all my sweetest dreams ever since my earliest childhood? Love you? How could I choose but love you?"

She paused abruptly with a deep-drawn sigh of joy, awed at the depth and vehemence of her own love, looking up in his face with those eloquent guileless eyes, in which lay all the tenderness, ardent yet undefiled, which he had awakened in her pure but impassioned heart. How could he remember aught else when love like this was offered him; how could he think of anything save the heaven shrined for him in those fond words and loving eyes? He clasped her closer still against his breast, pressing his lips on hers with the passionate fire of his vehement nature.

"My God! if you love me like this, how do I love you! Would to Heaven I could reward you for it!"

Alma, who knew not his thoughts or his meaning, looked up with a smile, half shy, half mournful, yet inexpressibly beautiful, with its frank gladness and deep tenderness.

"Ah, what reward is there like your love?"

De Vigne kissed her lips to silence; he dare not listen to the eloquence that lured him in its unconscious innocence with such fierce temptation. For, now that the first moments of wild rapture had passed, the memory of his marriage, of his resolves, of his duty, shown him by a much younger, and in such matters equally latitudinarian a man, and acknowledged to himself, by reason and honor, justice and generosity, of his right to tell her fully and freely of the fetters that held him, and the hateful woman that Church and Law decreed to be, though heart and nature refused ever to acknowledge as, his wife; all these rushed on him, and stood between him and his new-won heaven, as we have seen the dark and spectral shadow-form of the Hartz Mountains rise up cold and grim between us and the sweet rose-hued dawn which is breaking over the hills and valleys, and chasing away with its golden glories the poisonous shades and shares of night.

He had no power to end with his own hand this fresh and glorious existence which had opened before him. If he had ended with absinthe or with laudanum his own life, men would have prosed sermons over him, and printed his condemnation in glaring letters; yet, alas for charity or judgment! they would have condemned him equally because he shrank from this far worse and more cruel self-murder—the assassination of love, the suicide of the soul. By Heaven! men need be gods to conform to all the laws of men. We must love life so well, that when it is at its darkest, its loneliest, brimful with misery, bitter and poisonous as hemlock, we must never, in our cruelest hours of solitude, feel for an instant tempted to flee from its fret and anguish to the silent sleep of the tomb; yet—we must love it so little, that when it smiles the sweetest, when it is fair as the dawn and generous as the sunshine, when it has led us from the dark and pestilent gloom of a charnel-house back to a laughing and joyous earth, when it has turned our tears into smiles, our sorrow into joy, our solitude into a heaven of delight, *then* with an unhesitating hand we are to put aside the glorious cup of life, and turn away, without one backward glance from our loved Eden, into the land of darkness, of silence, and of tears. Alas! if God be as harsh to us as man is to his fellow-man! De Vigne's life, for the first time since long long years, was full of that delirious rapture for which his nature, knowing no medium between cold indifference or tropical passion, was formed, and for which his heart, so alien to the chill stoicism he had perforce tried to acquire, had longed and thirsted. In his extreme youth the love of women had been his chief temptation and his favorite plaything. It was very certain in his vigorous manhood, with all its ripened passions and intensified emotions, to become, when

once he yielded to it, his dearest delirium and sweetest ecstasy. Can you wonder that in its most delicious moments of first confession his courage failed him to shadow it with a cloud; much more to tell what might dash it forever from his lips; much more still to say sternly to the woman who worshiped him those bitterest of words spoken by human lips, "We must part?"

He was so happy! He could not choose but cast behind him the curse of his cruel ties. He was so happy! with that rapturous and tumultuous happiness born from the joy of a lingering caress, or the first vows of a newly-won love, that does not pause to count its treasures, or seek the springs of its delight, or ask how long its heaven will last, or by what right its heaven has been gained. It was a happiness, passionate, restless, vehement, like his natural character. He was not easy unless she was gathered in his arms, as if afraid that fate might tear her from him. He was never weary of making her repeat her fond assurances of the love she bore him. He was exigent in his love, and it was well that Alma's for him was so deep and warm that with her mélange of childlike frankness and woman's passion she responded fully to the bursts of intense tenderness which he lavished upon her—tenderness all the more intense for the uncertainty of its tenure, and the gloom which seemed to hang around it, as tempest-clouds hanging above the western sky at sunset make by force of contrast the rose-hued glow of golden rays still warmer and more brilliant.

All about and around them nature spoke of Love. The gorgeous and sultry day slumbered softly in the voluptuous summer air. The dark-green chestnut-boughs bent downward with the weight of their own beauty, while amid their white blossoms the thrush and goldfinch sang glad yet tremulous love-songs. The rich glow of the luxurious

summer-time lay on the earth in all its fragrant glory, while the scented limes, waving up to the deep azure sky above, and the crimson roses, their blushing petals still wet with the tears of ecstasy the clouds had shed when passing on forever from their loveliness, stirred in the low breeze, and filled the air with a dreamy luxuriance of odor.

All nature spoke of Love, yet of love more fully blest and less passionate than the mortal's who gazed upon it. Its beauty and its peace were at war with the fiery passions in his heart; its eternal calm irritated him, even while its voluptuous warmth and loveliness stole over his senses.

"How well do you love me, Alma?" he said, abruptly, as they sat beside the open bay-window, his arms still round her, her soft small hands held in his, her head, with its golden and perfumed hair, leaning against his breast, her eyes sometimes drooped under their long black lashes, more often raised to his with their fervent, trustful gaze, and on her face the flush of joy too deep to last.

"How well do I love you?" she repeated, with her old, arch, amused smile playing round her lips. "Tell me, first, how many petals there are in those roses, how many leaves on the chestnut-boughs, how many feathers in that butterfly's wings—then, perhaps, I may tell you how well I love you, Sir Folko!"

De Vigne could not but smile at the poetry and enthusiasm of the reply—so like Alma herself; but as he smiled he sighed impatiently.

"I am 'Sir Folko' no longer, Alma; the name was never appropriate. I have always told you I am no stainless knight. Call me Granville. I have no one to give me the old familiar name now."

"Granville!" murmured Alma, repeating the name to herself, with a deeper flush on her cheeks. "Granville! Yes, it is a beautiful name, and I love it because it is yours;

yet I love Sir Folko best, because others have called you Granville before me, but 'Sir Folko' is all my own!"

Her innocent speech stung him to the heart; he remembered how truth, and honor, and justice demanded of him to tell her *who* had "called him Granville before her."

"Still, if you like it best, it is everything to me," she went on responding to her own thoughts. "Granville! You will be that to me, and Major De Vigne to all the rest of the world, won't you? it makes me seem nearer to you; but I must call you Sir Folko sometimes."

She spoke so naturally—as if all their future would be spent together! He interrupted her almost hastily:

"But you have not answered my question. How much do you love me? Come, tell me!"

"How *can* I tell you?" she answered, looking up in his face with that smile so tender that it was almost mournful. "It seems to me that no one could ever have loved as I do you. My earliest memories are of you; every recollection is of some noble or generous act of yours; you realize my noblest ideals; you are twined into my every thought and wish; you fill my dreams by night and day; in spirit I am always with you, and without you my life is dark and dreary as a desert. How much do I love you? Oh! I will tell you when you number the rose-leaves or count the river waves, then, but not till then, could I ever gauge my love for you!"

He pressed her closer to him, yet he asked a cruel question:

"But if I left you now—if I were ordered on foreign service, for instance, and died in battle, could you not find fresh happiness without me?"

She clung to him, all her radiant joy banished, her face white and her eyes wild with a prescient dread:

"Oh! why do you torture me so? Such jests are cruel

You know that you are the life of my life, and that no other man, even had you never cared for me, would ever have been anything to me. I do not tell you I would die for you, that is a hackneyed phrase not fit for deep and earnest love like ours, though, Heaven knows, existence would be no sacrifice if given up to serve you; but I would live for you—I *will* live for you as no woman ever lived for man. I will increase all talents God has given me that you may be prouder of me; I will try and root out all my faults, that you may love me better. If ever you lose your wealth, as rich men have done, I will work for you, and glory in my task. To share the pomp of others would be misery, to share your poverty, joy. I will pray to Heaven that I may always be beautiful in your eyes; but if you ever love another, do not tell me, but kill me, as Alarcos slew his wife: to lose my life would be sweeter than to lose your love. If war calls you, I will follow—death and danger would have no terror by your side—and if you died in battle, I would be truer to you, till we met beyond the grave, than woman ever was to any living love. But—my God! you *know* how well I love you; why do you torture me thus?"

She had spoken with all that impassioned fervor natural to her, but passion so intense treads close on anguish; all the soft bloom of youth and joy forsook her lips, and her head drooped upon her bosom, which heaved with uncontrollable sobs. Poor child! she had shed bitter tears in her short life, but these were the first of those waters of Marah which flow side by side with the hot springs of Passion. De Vigne pressed her with almost fierce tenderness to his heart, lifted her face to his, and called back the rose-hued light of life to her cheeks and brow with breathless caresses, as if he would repay with that mute eloquence the perfect love which touched him too deeply to answer it

in words. It struck far down into his heart, stirring all its long-sealed depths, this noble, generous, and high-souled love now felt for him. All its devotion and heroism; all its unselfishness, and warmth, and trust; all the diviner essence which breathed in it, marking it out from man's and woman's ordinary loves, brutal on the one side, exigent and egotistical on the other; all the high devotedness and impassioned fervor upon her speaking face, struck home to the better nature of De Vigne, and there came upon him a mortal anguish of regret that with this noble, frank, and tender heart he should give nothing but gain all; that it would be he who would ask sacrifices of her, not she who would receive at his hands the rank and honor and position which he would have delighted in showering on her, not for the world's sake, but as gages of his own love. To him, generous-hearted even to his foes, liberal where he was most indifferent, not to be able to recompense this perfect love with the only reward a man can give the woman dearest to him—to be compelled to ask one who trusted him so entirely and loved him so unselfishly to sacrifice herself for him, and live under a social ban for his sake, was pain bitter and inexpressible. Yet with it all was a delicious joy at finding himself so loved, a delirious rapture at the response so ardent, yet so delicate, which she gave to his own passion—how could he leave her now?—how could he, even without thought of himself, send her from his arms into the chill unloving world?—how could he consign her to the death in life which she had told him existence without him would be to her now? His heart was at once a very hell and heaven within him; passionate joy to be so loved, mingling passionate regret to be denied, by his own past folly, from rewarding such a love with the honor and the name it merited. In its struggling he lavished on her all the vehement fondness that a man ever

peared on the object of his idolatry; in those few hours she had grown unutterably dear to him, though, save a few murmured and feverish words, his passions were too strong to form themselves to speech. But one other question he put to her:

‘Darling, if you love me like this, would you be content with me for your sole companion, away from the hum of men and the pleasures of society, alone in an Eden of the heart?’

She thought that he was doubting and trying her, and laughed a low joyous laugh, looking up in his face with an arch mischief, with something of her old *méchanceté*, hushed for a time into a deeper happiness.

‘I shall not answer you. You are a great deal too exigent! Do you want me to flatter you any more?’

‘No, but I wish you to tell me,’ answered De Vigne, with his impatient persistence, looking with his whole soul into her upraised eyes, and awing her childlike gayety with the depth and vehemence of his own fiery heart. ‘For me, with me, could you bear the world’s sneer? With the warmth of love around you, would you care what the world said of you? Should I be sufficient for you if others look coldly and neglected you?’

Even now his literal meaning did not occur to her; she neither knew nor dreamt of any ties that bound him; and she still thought he was trying to see how little or how much she loved him.

‘Why do you ask me?’ she said, almost impatiently, her eyes growing dark and humid with her great love for him. ‘You know well enough that ‘for you,’ and ‘with you,’ are talismans all-powerful with me. Your smile is my sole joy, your coldness my sole sorrow. While you were with me the world’s frowns would be nothing: if I were happy, what should I care how the chill winds blew

without, so as they touched not me and what I loved? You are all the world to me; in such a life *I* should not be the one to weary. Sir Folko—Granville, why *will* you doubt me?"

"I do *not* doubt you! It would be better for you if your love were less true, or mine more worthy of it. Oh, Alma! Alma! would to God we had met earlier!"

But she did not hear his muttered words, nor see the hot tears that stood in his haughty and lustrous eyes: tears wrung from his very heart's depths; tears of gratitude, regret, remorse, and wholly of tenderness, as he bent over her, pressing his burning lips to her flushed brow and soft cheeks, warm with a feverish glow, the glow of joy, predestined not to last.

And now the sun was near his setting, and all the earth was brilliant with the imperial glories that attend the gorgeous burial of a summer day. Mingling rays of crimson and of glow stretched across the deep-blue sky, and steeping in light the snow-white fleecy clouds that rose up on the horizon, like the silvery mountain range of some far-off and Arcadian land. The roses glowed a deeper hue, the chestnut-boughs drooped nearer to the earth, intoxicated with their own beauty; the flowers hung their lovely heads, drunk with the nectar of the evening dew; the birds were gone to sweetest sleep, rocked by the warm west wind; the delicious odor from the closed flower-buds and perfumed lime-leaves filled the air with a still more exquisite odor, while already on the warm and radiant day descended the tender and voluptuous night.

The sunset hour, when the busy day still lingers on the earth, bowed down with the weight of sins and sorrows with which in one brief twelve hours the sons of men have laden her, and the night falls down with noiseless wing from heaven, to lay her soft hand on weary human eyes, and lead

them into dream-land, to rest awhile from toil and care. is ever full of Nature's deepest poetry. The working man at sunset leaves his plow and his hard toil for daily bread, and catches one glimpse of God's great mystery of beauty, as he sees the evening dew glisten in the dying eyes of the flowers his plow has slain. The Ave Maria at sunset wings its solemn chant over the woods and mountains, golden in God's own light, and mingles its human worship with the pure voiceless prayer of the fair earth. The soul of man at sunset shakes off the dust of the working world, and with its rest has time to listen to the sweeter under notes and more spiritual harmonies which lie under the rushing current of our outer life; and at sunset our hearts grow tenderer to those we hate, and more awake to all the silent beauty of existence which our strife, and fret, and follies mar and ruin; and—when we love—as the warm sunset fades, and the dreamy night draws on, all the poetry and passion that lie in us wake from their slumber, and our heart throbs with its subtle and voluptuous beauty.

The golden rays of the sun, while it still lingered over the lovely earth, as a lover loth to part, fell upon Alma's golden hair, and lit up her features with a strange radiance, touching the lips and cheeks into a richer glow, and darkening her eyes into a still deeper brilliance. De Vigne looked down upon her face as it rested against his breast, and she gazed up into his dark and brilliant eyes, in which a language so new and yet so natural was spoken to her. They were silent; they needed no words between them, a whisper now and then was all; their thoughts were better uttered by the caresses he lavished upon her, in the vehemence of his new-born love. The dangerous spell of the hour stole upon them; her soft arms were round his neck; his lips rested on her flushed brow; while one hand played with a thick silky lock of her golden hair which had escaped

from the rest and hung down to her waist, twisting it round his fingers and drawing it out, half in admiration of its beauty, half in absence of thought; while as the sun sank out of sight below the horizon, and the little crescent of the moon rose clearer in the evening ether, and the air grew sweeter with the more intense perfume of the early night, Alma might have known that the heart on which her young head rested was throbbing loudly with fiercer and more restless passion than the loving and tender joy which made *her* heart its own unclouded heaven.

And still he had not told her of his marriage: and still he said to himself, "I ought to leave her, but, God help us! *I cannot.*"

On their delicious solitude, alone with the beauty of nature and of love, the sound of a horse's hoofs broke, with the harsh clang and clamor of the outer world. All was so still around Alma's sequestered home, especially in the summer evenings, when the little animal life there was about the farm was hushed and at rest, that the unusual sound of human life brought, by its sudden inroad, the serpent of social life into the solitude of the heart, from which for awhile all memory of the prying and fretting world had been excluded.

The horse's gallop ceased at the little gate, and the wicket opened with a clash of its iron latch. De Vigne half started, with a vague dread that some one had come to try and rob him of his new-won treasure. The strongest nerves grow highly strung at times; when the poetry of life wakes in the hearts of men of action, and passion rises up out of their ordinarily calm existence, their whole souls stir with it, as the great seas that do not move for light showers or low winds arise at the sound of the tempest, till all nature is awed at their vehemence, and their own lowest depths tremble with the convulsion.

"What is the matter?" whispered Alma, as she saw his eyes straining eagerly to see who the new-comer was.

"Nothing, nothing," he answered, hastily. He could not tell her that the vague dread upon him (upon him! he who had laughed at every danger, and held his own against every foe) was the terror and the horror of that woman whom the Church and Law called his wife. He gave a deep sigh of relief as he saw that it was only his own groom, Warren, coming up the path with a note in his hand; but his eyebrows contracted, that instantaneous sign with him of irritation and annoyance, and the blood mounted to his forehead in anger at the interruption. With the contradictory waywardness of human nature, while he knew that he should never leave Alma unless some imperative call aided him to drag himself from her side, he could have found it in his heart to slay the man who would force him, however innocently, from his paradise.

The note was merely from Dunbar, major of Ours, to ask to see him at once, on business of urgent military importance; but as the envelope was marked outside "Immediate," François, his confidential servant, had sent a groom off with it as soon as he saw it.

De Vigne read the note in silence, only pointing to Alma the words on it, "Let me see you, if possible, early this evening," and sat still, tearing the paper into little pieces, with his teeth set, his face deadly pale, and a bitter struggle in his heart—a struggle more hard and cruel, even than to most men, to one who had followed all his impulses, whose will had been unbridled from his cradle, with whom to wish and to have had always been synonymous, and whose passions were as strong as renunciation was unaccustomed. With a fierce oath muttered in his teeth he sprang to his feet; half awed by the sternness on his face, the gray pallor of his cheek, and the flashing fire of his eyes, she took his

hands in her own with the caressing, girlish fondness of her usual manner.

"Must you go? Can't you give me one-half hour more? That gentleman does not care to see you as I care to keep you! The hours were always so long when you were away; what will they be now? Give me ten minutes more—just ten minutes! You must think of your little Alma before everybody now. No one cares for you as she does!"

Her loving, innocent words, the clinging touch of her little hands, the witchery of her face, lifted so trustingly and frankly up to his in the soft twilight shadows—what torture they were to him!

"Hush, hush!" he said, almost fiercely, crushing her in a passionate farewell embrace. "Do not ask me; for God's sake let me go while I can, Alma! Kiss me and forgive me, my worshiped darling, for all the sins in my past, and my acts and my thoughts, of which your guileless heart never dreams!"

She did not understand him; she had no clew to the wild thoughts rioting in his heart; but love taught her the sympathy experience alone could not have given; her kisses, warm and soft as the touch of rose-leaves, answered his prayer, and her words were fond as human words could be.

"Since I love you, how could I help but forgive you whatever there might be? No sin that you could tell me of would I visit upon you. I do not know what your words mean, but I do know how well I love you: too well to listen what others might ever say of you; too well to care what your past may have been. There is nothing but tenderness and faith between us; there never can be, there never shall be. Good night, my own dearest! God bless you!"

"God bless you!" murmured De Vigne, incoherently. "Let me go, let me go, Alma, while I have strength!"

In another moment the ring of his horse's hoofs rung loud on the stony road, growing fainter and fainter on the evening air, till it died away to silence; while Alma leaned out under the chestnut-boughs, looking up to the stars that were shining in the deep-blue sky, now that the golden sunset had faded, with tears of joy on her long black lashes and sighs of delight on her warm lips, dreaming her sweet love idyll, and thinking of the morrow that would bring him to her again.



PART THE NINETEENTH.

I.

A BITTERNESS GREATER THAN DEATH.

As soon as De Vigne reached town he went home and smoked—he needed the sedative badly enough—scarcely tasted some soup of all the dainty dinner that awaited him, drank plenty of iced hock, and drove to Dunbar's, glad of anything to do that would prevent his needing to think. Dunbar, in a very few words, told him what he wanted of him, which was to exchange with him back into the Dashers, and go out to the Crimea in his stead; but in lieu of the eager assent he had anticipated from so inveterate a campaigner and thorough-bred a soldier, he was astonished to see De Vigne pause, hesitate, and wait irresolute.

"I thought you would like it, old fellow," said Dunbar. "The exchange would be easily effected. I should be no good in the Crimea; the winter season would send me to

glory in no time with my confounded bronchia, while you seemed to enjoy yourself so thoroughly out in India, polishing off those black devils, that I thought you'd be delighted to get a chance of active service again."

"I enjoy campaigning; no man more so," said De Vigne, shortly; "and to give up a chance of active service is almost as great a sacrifice to me as anything. At the same time, circumstances have arisen which make me doubt whether I can go in your stead or not. Will you give me twenty-four hours to decide?"

"Very well—if you like. I know you will tell me this time to-morrow that you have already ordered your cases of Bass, and looked over your new rifles. You will never be able to resist the combined seductions of Turkish liaisons and Russian 'spearing,'" laughed Dunbar.

De Vigne laughed too; though, Heaven knows, laughter was far enough from his heart:

"Very possibly. Sport has always been my favorite Omphale; and it's one that never makes us pay a price for indulging in its amours; we can't say quite so much for the beau sexe! I'll send you a line to-morrow evening, yes or no."

"Oh! it's sure to be yes," said Dunbar. "You were always the very deuce for war and women, but I think campaigning carried the day."

De Vigne laughed again, *par complaisance*; but he thought of one woman he had learnt to love more dearly than anything else in earth or heaven. He left Dunbar, went back to his house, and shut himself in his own room. He lit his cigar, opened the window, and leaned out into the sultry July night. His honor and his love were at war, and the calm and holy midnight irritated and inflamed, where at another time it might have soothed him. Never in all his life, with its errors, its vehemence, its faults, its

hot instincts, its generous impulses, its haughty honor, never stained by a mean thought, but often hazarded by reckless passions, had his nature been so fairly roused as now. He knew that he had fallen far from his standard of truth and candor in the concealment of his marriage, which had gone on from day to day till he had won the deepest love he had ever had, ostensibly a free man; and that knowledge cut him to the soul, and gave him the keenest remorse he had ever known; for though he did much that was wrong in haste, his conscience was ever tender, and nothing could ever blunt him to any dereliction from frankness and honesty. But he knew, too, now that the evil was done, and Alma's life, as she had told him, would be desolate without him, that to leave her now would be to quench all the youth and glory from her young days, and refuse her the sole consolation in his power to give her his love—no light consolation to a woman of her mind and nature.

He *could* not have broken from her now; to have left her unprotected, unportioned, friendless, to brave the blasts of the world with her high spirit and warm susceptibilities; to have bade her farewell for long and weary years, perhaps for life itself, never to meet again, never again to look into each other's eyes, and together breathe the free fresh air of the fair earth, so fair to those who love; never to pass another golden hour together, but to linger through all existence apart—apart in all the glorious light of life; apart till cold gray age crept on, and both were laid in the narrow chamber of the dead; apart even to the last, the lips that had vainly longed for sweet caresses, silent and fixed; the eyes that had vainly yearned for one sight of the loved face, closed and unconscious; the hearts that had throbbed with natural human love, stilled and powerless forever. To have lived thus apart from life onward into

death! He would have had no strength to do it; no courage to face so dreary and hopeless a future; no power to condemn her and himself to this gray and weary anguish of separation. To break from her now would have been to tear his very heart-strings from their core; all his soul revolted from the cruel and unnatural divorce, the divorce of human hearts created for each other's joy, formed to love and live in that gracious and golden earth which God gave to man, and man has marred so sadly for himself and for his fellows.

The Wife the law forced on him his nature, his honor, and his heart rejected and forswore; the wife the law denied him all alike pointed out and accepted, and to her he would have been faithful to the grave. All the manhood in him rebelled against the false and hideous marriage the world had fastened on him as just and valid; more cruel than the iron shackles on the dying limbs of the Neapolitan Pironti, more loathsome than the festering sting of the scorpion or the murderous and relentless bite of the vampire. The world's decree had fastened the shackles upon him, even though with every link of the fetters the iron entered into his soul as when the chains were fastened upon the quivering bodies in the Galera Politica of our own day. On the world he would revenge himself, and if social law had withered half his life social opinion should not have power to despoil the rest.

"God help her," he muttered to himself, as he looked down into the dark and silent street; "I will be truer to her than any husband ever was to any wife. She is my wife by love, by reason, by right, and when others sneer at her or pass her coldly by because she has sacrificed herself for me, I will atone to her for all—I will give up the world. and live for her alone. Since I have crushed my little flower in my headlong path, I will make up to her by

guarding her from all blight or storm. Would to Heaven I were worthy of her!"

Before he slept that night (and his slumber came not without an anodyne) his resolve was made. To-morrow he would tell her of his marriage—tell her all. If she still loved him, and still wished to live for him, passionately as his heart was bound to the Service, he would throw up his commission and take her to Italy or the Ionian Isles, where he would lavish on her all the luxuries and pleasures wealth could bring, and give her all he knew her heart craved, and what would be all-sufficient to her affectionate and unselfish nature—love. He would live for her alone; if, in time, he missed the glare and excitement of his past life with men, this sacrifice, in return, he at the least owed her; he would not bring her to the din of cities where coarse glances might pain the heart that had as yet known no shame, and where coarse judges would class her with the base Floras and Leilas of her sex. He would give her the life of beauty her vivid imagination would paint and thirst for, and for himself—De Vigne, so long alone in the world, so long chilled against his nature by adverse chances, would have paid down any price to win the luxury of love, pure, devoted, single-hearted, unstained by a single coarse instinct and unselfish impulse—love such as he knew Alma Tressillian bore for him.

Military duties kept him until late the next day. A soldier's life is not all play, though the foes to a standing army are given to making it out so. Several things called his attention that morning, and he had afterward to attend the first sitting of a court-martial on one of those low practical jokes with which raw boys bringing their public school vulgarities with them stigmatize a Service that enrolls the best gentlemen, the highest courage, and the most

finished chivalry of Europe, whose enemies delightedly pounce on the exception to uphold it as the rule.

The court-martial was not over till between two and three; De Vigne then hastily got unharnessed and into mufti, drank some soda-water—luncheon he very rarely took—lighted a cheroot, and threw himself across his horse. When he had once determined on a thing he never looked back; sometimes it had been better for him if he had. Yet, in the long run, I have known more mischief done by indecision of character than anything else in the world, and he is safe to be the strongest and stoutest-hearted who never looks back, whether he has determined on quitting Sodom or staying in it. The evil lies in hasty judgment, not in prompt action.

Right or wrong, however, he never *had* looked back, and nothing would ever have taught him to do it. His mind was made up—if Alma still loved him on hearing all, to take her to some southern solitude, and give up his life to her; if she reproached and condemned him, to take Dunbar's place, and fight in the Crimea till he fell—and nothing would have stirred either of his resolves. In all his life he had never turned back from any path where his vehement impulse led him; he was not likely to swerve or falter in this, on whose goal his heart was so utterly and entirely set, and to which an attachment stronger and infinitely deeper than even he had ever known lured him to the life for which, in his wild youth, he had not cared, but for which irresistible longings had broken up from the hot well-springs that lay ice-bound, but never dead, under the chill stoicism that covered his passionate manhood. He rode at a gallop from London to Richmond—rode to the fevered thoughts that chased each other through his mind, many of them of bitter pain and sharp stinging regret, for to the man of honor it was no light trial to say to the

woman who had trusted him, "I have deceived you!"—some of them of an involuntary self-reproach at the memory of how little he had merited and fulfilled the trust Boughton Tressillian had placed in him "as a man who will not misjudge my motives nor wrong my confidence." Yet all fears were crossed, and all remorse silenced, and outweighed by that wild delirium of joy of which his nature was capable—that fiery glow and triumph with which his great love could not but excel in the love it had won back in return, and the happiness she had wrested from life which had tried so hard to conquer him, and condemn him in the full vigor of youth and manhood to a cruel bondage and a chill and joyless solitude—a solitude that was not even freedom!

All more gloomy memories vanished, as shadows slink away before the sultry beauty of the noon, as he came within sight of Alma's home; his pulses glowed with all the fire of his earliest boyhood, his heart throbbed quicker, as he thought of her fond welcome. He pulled up his horse with such abruptness that the beast reared and fell back on his haunches; he threw himself off the saddle with a headlong impetuosity that might have lost him life or limb, flung the bridle over the post, and entered. The morning was gray and wet—strange contrast to the radiant summer the night before—the birds were silent, the flowers were snapped off their stems, their scattered petals lying stained and trodden on the moist gravel; his hurried steps stamped the discolored rose-leaves into the earth, and the dripping chestnut-boughs shook raindrops on him as he passed.

He brushed past the dank bushes in haste, careless, indeed unconscious, of the rain that fell upon him, his mind and heart full of the bitter history he had to tell, and of the love which had stirred every fiber of his warm and

deep, though long silent, affections, now fastened on Alma with a strength far surpassing the passion, vehement, it is true, but wayward and fickle, with which other women had inspired him. With all the impatience of his nature he glanced up at the house as he approached. He expected to find her looking out for him, to see her eyes fixed wistfully upon the gate, and to watch the radiance of joy dawn upon her face as she beheld him. He wanted to see that her thoughts and moments were consecrated to him in his absence as well as his presence, and to have in her joyous welcome and her rapid bound to meet him, surer evidence still of her love. He had no doubt of her; he knew that Alma was too fond to weigh the world against him, to balance love with prudence, and cloak egotism in the guise of affronted virtue. He had no fear but that she would link her life to his in the union for which nature pleaded, and which was their manhood's and their womanhood's right. Still, not to see her there struck a deadly chill into his heart; it was his first disappointment in her—a disappointment that was almost a prophecy.

With a strange, disproportionate anxiety he brushed past the dripping chestnut-boughs, ran up the steps of her bay-window, pushed open the glass door, and entered. There were her easel, her flowers, her little terrier, Pauline upon her stand pluming her feathers and congratulating herself on her own beauty, one of his own books, "Notre Dame," open on her low chair, with some moss-roses flung down in a hurry on its leaves; her colors, and brushes, and half-finished sketches scattered over the room—but the little mistress and queen of it all was absent. There was no sweet welcome for him, no loving, radiant face uplifted to his, no rapid musical voice to whisper in his ear earnest, impassioned words, no soft caresses to linger on his lips, no warm young heart to beat against his own

He glanced hastily round on the still deserted chamber, then opened the door, and called her by her name. The house was low and not large, and he knew she would come at the sound of his voice as a spaniel at its master's call. There was no reply; the building was silent as death, and his heart beat thickly with a vague and startled dread. He went on the staircase and repeated her name; still there was no reply. Had she been anywhere in the house, small as it was, he knew she would have heard and answered him. A horrible unexplained fear fastened upon him, and he turned into a small old-fashioned bed-chamber, the door of which stood open, for in its farther window he caught sight of the old woman, her nurse, alone, but sitting in her wicker chair, her head covered with her apron, rocking herself to and fro in the silent and querulous grief of age.

It is no metaphor that his heart stood still as he beheld her grief, which, mute as it was, spoke to him in a hundred hideous suggestions. She started up as his step rang on the bare floor, and wrung her hands, the tears falling down her wrinkled cheeks.

"Oh, sir! oh, sir! my poor young lady—my pretty darling——"

His hand clinched on her arm like an iron vice.

"My God! what has happened?"

"That ever I should live to see the day," moaned the old woman. "That ever I couldn't have died afore it. My pretty dear—my sweet little lady that I nursed on my knee when she was a little laughing——"

His grasp crushed on to her wrist, while his words broke from him inarticulate and broken in his dire agony.

"Answer me—what is it? Where is she? Speak—do you hear?"

The woman heard him, and waved to and fro in the garrulous grief of her years.

“Yes, sir—yes; but I am half crazed. She’s gone—my poor dear darling!”

“Gone—*dead*?”

The hue of death itself spread over his face. He let go his hold upon her arm and staggered backward, all life seeming to cease in the mortal terror of suspense and dread.

“No, sir—no, thank Heaven!” murmured the woman, blind to the agony before her in her own half-fretful sorrow. “Not dead, the pretty dear, though some, I dare say, would sooner see her in her coffin, and sure she might be happier in her grave, than she’ll be now, poor child!”

The blood rushed back to his brain and heart; his strong nerves trembled, and he shook in every limb in the anguished agitation of that brief moment which seemed to him a ceaseless eternity of torture. If not dead she could not be lost to him; no human hand had power to take her from his arms.

All his fiery passion, which never brooked opposition or delay, awoke again. He seized the garrulous woman in a grasp whose fervency terrified her:

“Where is she, then? Speak—in a word—without that senseless babble.”

“Yes, sir, yes,” sobbed the old nurse, half lost in her quavering sorrow, but terrified at his manner and his tone. “She’s gone away, sir, with that soft, lying, purring villain—oh, Lord! oh, Lord! what is his name?—that false, silky, girl-faced lord—a duke’s son they said he was—who was always hankering after her, and coming to buy pictures, and cared no more for pictures than that cat. She’s gone off with him, sir—that dear, innocent child, that a bad man

could trap into anything. Thank God! her poor grandfather died before it; it would have broke his heart almost: his pretty darling, that he'd have thought too good for a king on his throne. And it's all my fault. I should have told her what bad men will be—but she was always such a proud little lady, I never thought of saying a word to her, or daring to tell her what she oughtn't to do. And now she's gone away with him, the lying, silky villain, and he'll no more marry her than he'll marry me; and he'll leave her to starve in some foreign land, most likely, and I shall never see her little bright face again. Oh, Lord! oh, Lord! sir, you men have much to answer for——”

“She is gone!—with him!”

If she had not been so wrapped in her own rambling regrets she must have noticed the terrible, unutterable anguish in his hoarse and broken words as he grasped her arm with almost wild, unconscious ferocity of madness:

“Woman, it is a vile plot—a lie. She has been trapped, deceived. She has not gone of her own will!”

“Yes, sir, she is—she's gone of her own mind, her own choice,” moaned the old nurse.

“I tell you she did *not*—it is a lie,” swore De Vigne. “He has stolen her, tricked her, fooled her away. It is a lie, I tell you, and you have been bribed to forge it. He has decoyed her away, and employed you for his accomplice, to pass this varnished tale on me. My God! if you do not acknowledge the truth I will find a way to make you!”

Terrified at his violence the old woman shook with fear, tears falling down her pale and withered cheeks:

“I tell you truth, sir—before Heaven I do. Do you think *I* should injure her, my pretty little lady, that I've loved like my own child ever since my poor master brought her from foreign lands. a little lisping, gold-haired thing?

Do you think I should join in a plot against her, when I've loved her all her life? Don't you think, sir, I'd be the first to screen her and the last to blame her? I tell you truth, sir, and it breaks my heart in the telling. She went of her own free will, and nothing could stop her. She must have planned it all with him yesterday when he was here; the oily, cruel villain! I knew he didn't come after them pictures; but I never thought Miss Alma would have come to *this*. She went of her own will, sir—she did, indeed! Lord Vane's carriage—his broom, I think they call it—came here between twelve and one this morning; not him in it, but his valet, and he asked straight for Miss Tressilian, and said he had a message for her, and went in to give it. I thought nothing of it—so many people have been coming and going lately for the pictures; and indeed, sir, I thought he was your servant, for the man looked like one you used to send here, till my boy, Tom, come in, and said he'd asked the coachman, and the coachman told him his master was the Duke of Tiara's son, and lived in the Albany, I think he called it, whatever that may be. The man wasn't there long before I heard Miss Alma run up stairs, and as I went across the passage I see her coming down them, with her little black hat on, and a cloak over her muslin dress; and a queer dread come over me, as it were, for I see her face was flushed, and she'd tears in her eyes, and a wild, excited look; and I asked her where she was going. But she didn't seem to hear me; and she brushed past me to where the man was standing. 'I am ready,' she says to him, very excited like; and then I caught hold of her—I couldn't help it, sir—and I said, though I didn't know where or why she was going, 'Don't go, Miss Alma—don't go, my darling.' But she turned her face to me, with her sweet smile—you know her pretty, imperious, impatient ways—'I must, nurse!' and I got hold

of her, and kept on saying, 'Don't go, Miss Alma! don't!—tell me *where* you're going, at least—do!—my dear little lady!' But you know, sir, if she's set her heart on a thing, it ain't never easy to set her against it; and there was tears in her eyes. She broke away with that willfulness she's had ever since she was a little child: 'I cannot stop, nurse—let me go!' and she broke away, as I said, and went down the garden path, sir, the man following after her, and she entered Lord Vane's carriage, and he got up in front, and they drove away, sir, down the road; and that's the last I ever see of my poor master's darling, Heaven bless her! and she'll be led into sorrow, and ruin, and shame, and she'll think it's all for love, poor child; and he'll break her heart and her high proud spirit, and then he'll leave her to beg for her bread; for that bird's better notions of work than she; and a deal fit she is to cope with the world, that's so cold and cruel to them that go against it!" * * * * *

But long ere she ceased her garrulous grief, heedless of his presence or his absence in her absorbed sorrow for her lost darling, De Vigne had staggered from the chamber, literally blinded and stunned by the blow he had received. A sick and deadly faintness as after a vital wound stole over him, every shadow of color faded from his face as on his marriage-day, leaving it a gray and ashy hue even to his very lips; his brain was dizzy with a fiery weight that seemed to press upon it; he felt his way, as if it were dark, into an adjoining room, and sank down upon its single sofa, all the strength of his vigorous manhood broken and cast down by his great agony. How great that agony was Heaven only knew.

He threw back, as a hideous nightmare, the thought that Alma could be false to him; that a girl so young, so frank, so fond, could be so arch an actress; that all those

loving words, those sweet caresses, that earnest and impassioned affection lavished on him but a few short hours before, were all a lie. Yet the curse of evidence chimed strangely in; he recalled her blush at his mention of Castleton's name; he remembered that his ex-valet, Raymond, had entered Castleton's service on being discharged from his; the mere circumstance of her having left with any one, for anywhere, without an explanation, a word, or a message to him—her lover, whom she had parted with so passionately the night before—these alone wrote out her condemnation, and shattered all hope before his eyes.

What it was to him with all his fiery passions, and deep, silent heart, so fixed and centered on this girl, to find her false, to lose the strongest love of all his life, to know the woman he coveted with the ardent avarice of jealous worship won by another, the joys he thirsted for given to a rival he hated with all the bitter hate of a man for the spoiler who has robbed him of his single treasure—human words, so weak even at the strongest to picture human woe, could never tell. He had had fierce wrongs, fiery hate, and deep, silent sorrows in his life, but none had been like this: the death-blow to all there was of youth, of faith, of beauty, and of glory in his life. Sudden and passionate as had been his dream of love was his terrible awakening. Every nerve seemed to ache with the dull and dreary anguish, every vein seemed on fire with the fell torture of jealousy, his brain grew dizzy trying to realize the hideous and incredible truth, he sat like a man paralyzed with a violent and vital blow. He had come full of such a radiant and impassioned future, and an agony worse than his wildest imaginations could have ever dreaded had met him on the threshold.

He sat there in as mortal anguish as man ever knew. If wrong there had been in his acts and his thoughts it

was fearfully and cruelly avenged, and the punishment far outweighed the sin. Across the midnight darkness of his mind gleamed lightning flashes of fiery thoughts. Once he started to his feet—in the delirium of jealousy he swore to find Castleton wherever he had hid, and make him yield her up, or fight for her till one or the other fell. But pride was not all dead in him—nor ever would be while he had life. Since she had gone to another, let another keep her!

He sat there, all hue of life blanched from his face, his hands clinched, his teeth set tightly as in lock-jaw; the very suddenness of the blow had struck him with something of the blind, dizzy unconsciousness of physical and mortal pain. Once he arose, and sought half unconsciously, and with something of the dreamy instinct of a man paralyzed by a blow struck at him in the dark, for some note, some sign, some token that might explain her flight, or show at least that she had remembered him whom she had betrayed. He found none, and he sank back on the little couch with a moan of weary anguish, and a bitter curse on the sex that had twice betrayed him.

And now it was that the great faults of De Vigne's nature—hasty doubt, and passionate judgment—came out and rose up against him, marring his life once more. That quick skepticism which one betrayal had engrafted on a nature naturally trusting and unsuspecting, never permitted him to pause, to weigh, to reflect; with the rapidity of vehement and jealous passion, from devoted faith in the woman he loved, he turned to hideous disbelief in her, and classed her recklessly and madly with the vilest and the falsest of her sex. Of no avail the thousand memories of Alma's childlike purity and truth which one moment's thought would have summoned up in her defense, of no avail the fond and noble words spoken to him but the day before, which one moment's recollection would have

brought to his mind to vouch for her innocence, and set before him in its vile treachery the plot to which she had fallen victim,—of no avail! Passionate in every impulse, hasty in every judgment, too cruelly stung to remember in his madness any reason or any justice, he seized the very poison that was his death-draught, and grasped a lie as truth.

How long he sat there he never knew; time was a long blank to him; roll on as it might, it could only serve him in so far as it brought him nearer to his grave. His brain was on fire, his thoughts lost in one sharp, stinging agony that had entered into his life never to quit it. Thought, memory, hope, were all merged in one fierce, unutterable anguish, where hate, and love, and a very delirium of jealousy seemed to goad him on to madness. He sat there, that one dread fiery weight upon him like molten iron pressing on his brain, till her little dog, that had followed him up the stairs, and now crouched near him, awed as animals always are at the sight of human suffering, crept up and licked his hand, uttering a long, low whine as if mourning for her lost to them both. The touch roused him: how often in happier days, before the curse of love rose up between them, had he smiled to see her playing like a child with her little terrier! The touch roused him, calling him back to the life charged with such unutterable woe for him. He lifted his head and looked around; the clouds had rolled away, and the evening sun, bursting out in all its glory, shone with cruel mockery into the little chamber which, as it chanced, was Alma's apartment. The lattice windows were open, and the roses and clematis looked in with their bright eyes, while the summer wind swept over them with a fresh glad fragrance, stirring the open leaves of a book that lay where she had left it on the dressing-table, and stirring the muslin curtains of the little

white bed where night after night her radiant blue eyes had closed in sleep, as pure and sweet as a harebell folding itself to slumber. As he lifted his eyes and looked around the little chamber, so fell his glance upon his own portrait, which hung against the wall with the sunlight streaming full upon it—the portrait which she had drawn from childish memory of her friend “Sir Folko.” The sight of the picture told him that it was her room into which he had staggered in his unconscious suffering, and recalled to him the early days when she had first shown him that portrait, lavishing on him her innocent gratitude, her playful tenderness; the early days when their intercourse had been shadowless, and the curse of love had not entered their lives and risen up between them. As he gazed around him at all the trifles that spoke to him like living things of the woman he had loved and lost, the bitter agony in his soul seemed greater than he could bear; the fierce tension of his strained nerves gave way; with one cry to Heaven in his mortal anguish, he fell like a drunken man across the little couch, his brow resting on the pillow where her golden head had so often lain in childlike sleep, deep sobs heaving his breast, burning tears forcing themselves from his eyes, tears which seemed to wring his very life-blood from him in their fiery rain, yet tears which saved him in that horrible hour from madness.

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That night he wrote thus briefly to the Major:

“DEAR DUNBAR,—I desire to exchange with you if it can be effected. There is no time to be lost.

“Yours sincerely,

“GRANVILLE DE VIGNE.”

II.

HOW WE RODE IN THE LIGHT CAVALRY CHARGE.

ALADYN and DEVNO!—those green stretching meadows, those rich dense forests, catching the golden glow of the sunshine of the East—those sloping hill sides, with the clematis, and acacia, and wild vine clinging to them, and the laughing waters of lake and stream sleeping at their base—who could believe that horrible pestilential vapors stole up from them, like a murderer in the dark, and breathing fever, ague, and dysentery into the tents of a slumbering army, stabbed the sleepers while they lay, unconscious of the assassin's hand that was draining away their life and strength? Yet at the very names of Aladyn and Devno rise to memory days of futile longing and weary inaction, of negligence inconceivable and ennui unutterable, of life spent for the lack of simplest common sense, and graves filled by a school-boy greed for fruit—such fruit as in such a land was poison when backed by a mad draught of raki. Days when, forbidden to seek another foe, Englishmen and Frenchmen went down powerless and spiritless before the cholera, which had its deadly grip upon them ere they heard its stealthy step. Days, when you could not stroll on the beach without finding at your feet a corpse hastily thrust into the loosened sand, for dogs to gnaw and vultures to make their meal, or look across the harbor without seeing some dead body floating, upright and horrible, in the face of the summer sun. Days, when pestilence was abroad through the encampment from Monastir to Varna, and the stately Guards, the flower of England, the men fresh from the easy, lounging life of London and Windsor, these soldiers “qui marchent comme les

Dieux," were so worn out by exhaustion, disease, and the deadly Bulgarian air, that they had barely strength left to march from Aladyn to Varna. Not the place for men to dwindle away their days who had a campaign, and a tough siege, and a bitter winter before them; still less the place for men to come to whose hearts were broken, and whose lives were dark and hopeless. Action and excitement are opiates and panaceas to the deadliest sorrow; inaction eats into the gayest heart, and depresses the lightest spirits, and men who will bear to die in the greatest torture without a murmur or a tremor in their voice, will sicken, and pine, and grow depressed and dispirited, when waiting and waiting, as the English and French forces waited on the pestilential shores of Bulgaria.

Yet we went out to the Crimea light-heartedly and cheerfully enough, God knows. We, tired of our easy life at home, lounging in clubs, pacing in the Ring, and flirting in Belgravian salons, were glad of a chance of that real campaigning of which almost all of us were ignorant, knowing no heavier fatigue than a Hyde Park field-day or a Woolwich sham fight; and the men took it calmly and cheerily, from the gravest lance-corporal to the youngest lad who captivated maid-servants with his dainty stable-dress. Ours were as fine a set of fellows as England ever sent away from her barracks, and though people tell us that our Service is apt to make much of small grievances, (an accusation I think they can hardly make against us when great ones fall in to our share,) the men bore the discomforts of shipboard, cramped and cooped up, pitching and tossing over the Bay of Biscay, with nothing to do but to puff at their pipes, and look at the seagulls, and suffer the miseries of the *mal de mer* with as much pluck and patience as could be expected from any Britons.

Women wept sorely the day our transport got under

weigh; they would have wept more bitterly still if they had foreseen the pestilence of Bulgaria, the shelterless landing of the 14th of September, the heaps of gay uniforms and stiffening corpses thrust pêle-mêle into a hastily dug pit; the long nights in the trenches, where men fell and none marked their fall; the winter days, when, more miserable than the poorest beggar crouching in a gutter at home, Englishmen were bidden to fight, but only left to endure, and not a soul in England seemed to care whether they lived or died.

We went out to the Crimea delightedly enough; most of us had a sort of indistinct panorama of skirmishes and excitement, of breathless charges and handsome Turkish women, of dangers, difficulties, and good tough struggles, pleasant as sport but higher spiced; of a dashing, brilliant campaign, where we should taste real life and give hard hits, and win perhaps some honor, and where we should say, "*Si l'on meurt, eh bien, tant pis!*" in the gay words of the merry French bivouac-song. We thought of what our governors or grandsires had done in the Peninsula, and longed to do the same—we did not guess that as different as the bundles of linen, with wrinkled, hideous features, that the Tartars called women, were to the lovely prisoners from the convents of flaming Badajoz, would be the weary, dreary, protracted waiting while the batteries strove to beat in the walls of Sebastopol, to the brilliant and rapid assault by which Ciudad Rodrigo was won! I do not like to write of the Crimea; so many painful memories come up with its very name—memories such as all who were out there must have by the score: of true friends slaughtered by negligence and lack of knowledge; of noble fellows lost through the red-tapeism of regulation, that kept its bales of drugs miles away from those that wanted them, and would not give up necessities to save the soldiers

from dying off one after another, like bees in a smoked hive, without "an order." Of the army that landed in Galipoli, how many in six months' time had fallen in the field, and how many had died of cholera, of dysentery, of pestilence, caught among the deadly forests of Bulgaria, or brought on by the exposure of the night of their first bivouac; of cold, and fevers, and agues, from that piercing wind from which they were given no protection; from that deadly frost, before which mules, and horses, and men went down, while the soldiers in the trenches were dropping off for simple lack of any clothing warmer than rags an English pauper would reject, and the Household Troops were shoeless in the snow! A devil within me always rises up when I think of it—of the white gravestones on Cathcart's Hill, and the rough burial-places of those whom sickness and privation slew when they had come untouched from under the very batteries of the enemy; of Lacy Yea's face, as it lay swollen and almost undistinguishable on the slopes of the Redan; of Louis Nolan's last shriek; of our men, with the bones of their frost-bitten hands laid bare; of the soldiers, who would have fought to the last gasp with delight, yet were forced to be, as they termed it, with the iron in their souls, — "*poor, broken-down, old commissariat mules;*" of the young boys, delicately nurtured, and fresh from every luxury and comfort in their homes, where to wish was to have, and life was one bright summer day, toiling along in the blinding snow that cavalry horses refused to face, with their clothes hanging about them in miserable tatters, helping their men to tramp the weary five miles between the camp and the commissariat stores, with a cask of rum or biscuit; bearing negligence, privation, storm, and misery, animatedly, cheerily, laughing and comforting their men, even while their own young lives were slowly ebbing away with a sickness unto death;

—when I think of all I saw and heard, of all I know was done and suffered there, a devil rises in me that nothing can exorcise. Nothing personal prompts my anger; I liked the campaign well enough myself, having one of the very few tents that stood the hurricane, not missing more than nine-tenths of my letters, enjoying the exceptional blessing of something like a warm coat, and being now and then the happy recipient of a turkey, or some coffee that was *not* ground beans.

I was rewarded as much as any man could expect to be. I have a medal (shared in common with Baltic sailors who never saw the foe, save when securely anchored off Cronstadt) and three clasps, like the privates of the Line, though I am not aware that any infantry man was present at the Balaklava charge. When I came home I was received in a highly enthusiastic manner by the tenantry at Longholme, who, having an eye to the non-raising of their rents, would have cheered the son of the lord of their manor till their throats were hoarse, though he had been as great a brute as the Muscovites who bayoneted our wounded on the field. No; I am perfectly content myself, being happily able to buy my own majority, and being, therefore, independent of that very precarious thing “promotion for distinguished services.” But when I think of them all—my dead friends, men so gallant-hearted, men of such high mettle and courage, who went out so cheerily to danger, and wooed death as others woo their brides, and bore with every privation, only thinking of their “poor men,” whose deprivations cut nearer to them than their own, and who laid down their lives cheerfully and unreluctantly, though to many of them life was very sweet and very precious, dying of thirst and gunshot wounds on the dark battle-field, or of typhus fever or cholera among the dreary and crowded hospitals,—when I think of them all,

whose bodies lie thick where the sweet wild lavender is blowing over the barren steppes of the Chersonese this summer's day, I remember, wrathfully, how civilians, by their own warm hearths, sat and dictated measures by which whole regiments starving with cold, sickened and died; and how Indian officers, used to the luxurious style of Eastern warfare and travel, asserted those privations to be "nothing," which they were not called to bear; and I fear—I fear—that England may one day live to want such sons of hers as she let suffer and rot on the barren plains of the Crimea, in such misery as she would shudder to entail on a pauper or a convict.

What a night that was the British army spent on September 14! Few of us will ever forget our first bivouac on the Chersonese soil. That pitiless drenching down-pour of sheets of ink-black water, soaking through and through every blanket or great-coat that we, without a tent over any one of our heads in that furious storm, could offer to oppose to its violence—what a night it was! his first taste of campaigning was rough enough to many a poor fellow. Old generals accustomed to easy fauteuils, pleasant mornings in club-windows, slow canters on park-hacks, and lengthened dinners, products of a cordon bleu, were glad of the shelter of a bit of water-proof wrapper, and envying the Duke and Sir George Brown their tilted cart. Young lords and honorables, with the down hardly on their cheeks, fresh from every luxury and pleasure, accustomed to get up at noon after their chocolate and French novel, to be dressed by their valet with finest linen and most delicious bouquet, were lying down with reeking pools for their beds, in the pelting, ceaseless storm of rain that poured all night on their defenseless heads from the inhospitable clouds of the Crimea. What a night it was! De Vigne, ever reckless of weather, had not even a blanket to wrap

round him, and lay there in the puddles of which the morass-like earth was full, the rain pouring down upon him, the sole man in that army of twenty thousand odd who did not vent his discomfort in groans or oaths; perhaps there was so great a tempest warring in his heart that all exterior miseries passed unnoticed. And Sabretasche, the refined, luxurious man of fashion, accustomed to an excess of luxury even in an age when luxury is at its height, who loved to surround himself with every delicacy and every pleasure that could lull the senses and shut out the harsher world, on whose ear, and eyes, and taste anything bizarre, painful, or unsightly jarred so unspeakably, and who had been used from his birth to the most voluptuous and raffiné life, passed the night in a storm to which we should not expose a dog, and in discomfort for which we should pity a beggar; yet gave away the only shelter he had, a Highland plaid, to a young boy who had but lately joined, a little fellow with a face as fair as a girl's, and who had barely seen seventeen summers, who was shivering and shuddering with incipient ague.

The stamp of their bitter fate was upon both those men; the wounds were too deadly and too recent to be yet skinned over; healed they deemed they never would be, while their hearts beat and pulses throbbed. How Violet and Sabretasche parted Heaven only knew; no human eyes had pried in upon them in that darkest hour; they had parted on the very day that should have been their marriage-day; and of all the bitter farewells that were spoken that year, when so many of the best beloved of women left England—left, never to behold it or them again—none was like unto theirs, when their lips met in kisses such as the living give the dead ere the tomb shuts them forever from their sight. They had parted—whether ever to meet again on earth who could tell? They had parted

—the lives that should have blent in one were torn asunder. He left her, and came among us—calm, gentle, kind to those about him—thoughtful of the comforts and the needs of his men and his horses; but his brilliant and subtle wit was silent; the melancholy which had tinged his character, even in his happiest hours, had closed wearily and hopelessly around him. His trial was known to all; even the men who had admired Violet's fair face when she had driven up to the barracks, or come to a luncheon in the mess-room, had caught some version and some glimmering of it, and there was not one among the Dashers who did not, in his own way, grieve for and reverence the Colonel's sorrow, for not Strangways, nor Yea, nor Eman, nor Trowbridge, were ever better loved by their men than Vivian Sabretasche was by his.

De Vigne was even yet more altered, and I, who knew nothing of the cause, saw with astonishment all the icy coldness and the chilling hardness which had grown on him after his fatal marriage, but which had of late been utterly dissipated, now closing round him again in tenfold gloom and impenetrability. I could but guess at the cause, when, before the embarkation, I, knowing nothing of his passion for Alma, had asked him if he had been to bid her good-by, and wondered what the poor little thing would do without her beloved Sir Folko;—he turned on to me, his face white as death, his eyes black as night:

“Never breathe that name to me again!”

I knew him too well to press questions upon him, and unspeakably as I wondered at this abrupt snap of a friendship which I had always thought would lead to something dearer between a man of his age and a girl of hers, I was obliged to be content with my suspicions as to the solution, in which I did not much doubt the passion that De Vigne had so contemptuously defied had been at work.

But, knowing him as I did, I was pained to see the bitter gloom which had gathered round him again, too deeply for trouble, danger, excitement, or care of comment, to have any power to dissipate it; the fierce and stormy passions chained and pent up within him could not but have effect upon his outward manner. He had an impatient, irritable hauteur to his men quite foreign to him, for to his soldiers he was invariably generous and considerate; he was much more stern in his military orders, for before he had abhorred anything like martinetism; and there was a settled and iron gloom upon him with which every now and then it seemed as if the fiery nature in him were at war, struggling like the flames of a volcano within its prison of ice. From the time he took Dunbar's place as major of Ours, I never saw him *smile*, not once, that sunny, sweet, and radiant smile which used to light up his face so strangely, however haughty or grave the moment before. I never saw him smile, but I did see him now and then, when he was sitting smoking in the door of his tent, or riding beside me home from a dog-hunt or a hurdle-race, look across to where the sea lay, with a passionate agony in his eyes, which must have poured out its pent-up suffering in a resistless tide under the shadow of night and solitude. All he seemed to live for was headlong and reckless danger, if he could have had it. The thing that roused him the most since we left England was when St. Arnaud, Bosquet, Forey, and their staff rode along the front of our columns before Alma, and we were told what the Marshal said to the 55th: "English, I hope you will fight well to-day."

"By Heaven!" swore De Vigne, fiercely, 'if I had been near that fellow I would have told him we will fight as we fought at Waterloo!"

It was a bitter trial to him, as to us all, that the Cavalry

could not do more on the 20th, when we sat in our saddles, seeing the serried columns of the Line dash through the hissing waters, red with blood and foaming with the storm of shot, and force their way through the vineyards of the Alma—that little tortuous stream where we tasted blood for the first time on Crimean soil, whose name, with all his self-command, made De Vigne wince more than a Cossack lance thrust through his side would have done. We had not enough to do to satisfy any one of us. Sabretasche had longed to lead the men, in whose efficiency to do anything he was almost as firm a believer as poor Nolan, on to some such brilliant charge as Anglesea's, when his magnificent rush of Royals, Grays, and Enniskilleners captured the eagles of D'Erlon's brigade; and De Vigne envied, with all the appreciation and admiring envy of a beau sabreur who knew what good fighting really was, the individual hair-breadth escape of the Guards, the rush of the Fusiliers, the way that Sir Colin's Highlanders won their bonnets. To have sit-like targets for the Russians' round shots, though our men were as immovable as if that storm of balls that tore through our lines and ripped up our horses had been soft summer rain, was much too quiet business for any of us. When we awoke on the morning of the 23d to march on to Katcha, awoke in the dull, dusky fog, through which the watch-fires struggled with the heavy damp and dew, and the rich thrilling roll of the French horns and drums and trumpets, all blending in one wild flourish, came rolling its stirring music through the valley of the Alma, De Vigne looked back to the plain, where nigh eight hundred men lay wounded and helpless, with only one English surgeon—Thompson of the 44th—left with them to care for their great needs, and as he looked wished, I believe, that the stinging, throbbing agony of his life had been stilled there once forever, and

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that ne could have fallen in the stead of little Walsham of the Artillery, or Monck of the 7th, or any other of the many shoveled into those yawning pits hastily dug on the hill-side for the dead that had fallen among the vineyards of Alma.

Heaven forbid that I should intrude a history of the Crimean campaign upon you. Most of you have somebody either beside you, or in your family, or on your visiting list, who will tell you better than I can write—since each man sees things through his own lorgnon, and there never was a battle yet fought, nor even the most insignificant skirmish, of which each individual present had not his own particular account, differing in pretty well everything from his comrades—of all we did and all we did not do. Besides, the Crimea is getting rococo now, and it is the fashion to look at it as a dim era of the past, and the blood spilt and the bodies strewn so thick upon its barren steppes have been superseded in interest by the “great national movement” of those civilians who are just now frantically leaving briefs and banks, offices and chambers and consultation-rooms, to shoot at butts, and show themselves in the streets, after the eccentric manner of all amateurs, in the glory of their full sleeves, Albert hats, and waving cocktails. Heaven forbid that I should bore you with a history of the Crimea. We would fain have done much more there if they had let us, and what we did do we do not need to din into anybody, since it was our simplest and our plainest duty.

We were weary of inaction; our Arm of the service had had little or nothing to do; we were not allowed to push on the pursuit at Alma, nor the charge at Mackenzie's Farm; we were stung by certain individual sneers that we were “too fine gentlemen for our work,” and we were longing to prove, as we should have done long before if

opportunity had not been denied us, that if we were "above our business of collecting supplies for the army," we could, if we had the chance, send home to England such a tale as would show them how cheaply the fine gentlemen of the Light Cavalry held life when honor claimed it, and would cover our slanderers forever in the shame of their own lies. Whether it was from necessity or from injustice, opinions differed, but we felt that our Arm had not had the opportunities given us we might have had, and De Vigne was not alone in the bitter oaths he swore at the enforced inaction of the Light Cavalry, when we might have shown them what we could do, had we only been allowed, both at, and subsequent to, Alma. He was not alone in the glow of excitement and the hope of "something to do," when, at half-past seven, the news of the Russians' advance came down to our camp on the dawn of the 25th of October, and without time for the men to water the horses, or get any breakfast for themselves, we were roused by the notes of Boot and Saddle, and drawn up on the slopes behind the redoubts. The story of that day is well enough known in England. How brightly the sun shone that morning, dancing on the blue strip of sea, and flashing on the lines of steel gleaming and bristling below; on the solid masses of the Russians, with their glittering lances and sabers, and their gay accoutered skirmishers whirling before their line of march like swallows in the air; on the fierce-eyed, rapid, brilliant Zouaves lying behind the earthworks; on our Light and Heavy brigades in front of our camp; on Sir Colin's Highlanders drawn up *two deep*;—the 93d did not need to alter their line even to receive the magnificent charge of masses of Muscovite cavalry. How brightly the sun shone,—and how breathlessly we waited in that dead silence, only broken by the clink and the ring of the horses' bits and the unsheathing of sabers,

as the Russians came up the valley, those splendid masses of cavalry moving en echelon up to the attack. Breathless every man on the slopes and in the valley, French and English, soldier and amateur, waited, while the grand line of the Muscovite Horse rode on to the 93d, who quietly awaited them, motionless and impenetrable as a wall of granite, firm and invulnerable as their own Highland seawall—awaited them, till with their second volley, rolling out on the clear morning air, they sent that splendid body of horse flying, shivered, like sea-foam breaking on a rock. Then came the time for Scarlett and his Heavies—when the Russian Lancers, and Hussars, and Dragoons galloped over the hill, their squadrons twice our length and more than twice our depth, and the trumpets rang out twice, and Lord Raglan and his staff, the French generals and their masses of infantry, and all the lookers-on gathered up yonder on the heights, held their breath when Grays and Enniskilleners, with the joyous cheer of the one, the wild shout of the other ringing through the air, rushed at the massive columns of the Russians, charged in among them, shaking their serried masses as a hurricane shakes woodland trees; and closing with their second line as it came up to retrieve the lost honor of the priest-blessed Muscovite lances, mingled pêle-mêle with them, their swords crossing and flashing in the air, reckless of all odds, cutting their way inch by inch through the dense squadrons closing round them—those “beautiful gray horses” pushing their road with that dash and daring which had once won them Napoleon’s admiration—till the 1st Royals, the 4th and 5th Dragoon Guards, rushed in to the rescue, and sent the Russian columns flying over the plain like a routed herd of cattle without a leader. How the lookers-on cheered them, waving their caps in their hands and shouting rapturous applause, till the heights rang again, as the

Brigadier and his Heavies rode back from their assault!— and De Vigne muttered, as he glanced down the line of our light brigade:

“By Heaven! what wouldn't I give to have ridden that charge with the Grays! When is our turn to come?”

Our turn was near at hand. An hour after we received the order to advance on the Russian guns. With the blame, on whomsoever it may lie of that rash order, I have nothing to do. That vexatious question can never be settled, since he on whose shoulders they place it lies in the valley of Balaklava, the first victim to it that fell, and cannot raise his voice to reply, or give the lie, if it be a lie, to his calumniators, as he would have done so fearlessly in his life. If Louis Nolan were to blame, his passionate love for our Arm of the service, and his jealousy over its honor, his belief that Light Cavalry would do all and anything though it were the work of demigods, and his irritation that hitherto we had not been given the opportunity we might have had, must plead his excuse; and I think his daring spirit, his brilliant courage, and the memory of that joyous cheer to his Hussars which ended in the wild death-cry which none who heard can ever forget, might be enough to silence the angry jar and jangle of contention above his grave, and set the seals of oblivion upon his error.

The order was given us to take the Russian guns. For the first time since we had landed a light of joy and pleasure came into the Colonel's mournful eyes; and his old proud, glad, sunlit smile flashed over De Vigne's face. We were so sick of inaction, of riding about the Chersonese doing nothing, and letting other men's names go home in the dispatches!

The order was given to take the Russian guns. At ten minutes past eleven we of the Light Brigade shook our

bridles and dashed off in the morning sunlight toward the Russian battery. Lookers-on tell me they could hardly credit that we, so few in numbers, and entirely unsupported, were going to charge an army in position, and that they gave us up for hopeless destruction as we swept past them full gallop, the sunshine catching the points of our sabers and flashing off our harness. If they did not credit it, *we* did. We knew it was against all maxims of war for cavalry to act without support or infantry at hand. We knew that in all probability few indeed, if any of us, would ever come back from that rapid and deadly ride. But the order was given. There were the guns—and away we went, quickening from trot to canter, and from canter to gallop, as we drew nearer to them. On we went, spurring our horses across the space that divided us from those grim fiery mouths. On we went: Sabretasche's silvery voice cheering us on, and the delicate white hand that Belgravian belles admired pointing to the guns before us; De Vigne a little in advance of us all, sitting down in his saddle as in by-gone days, when he led the field across Northampton pastures or Leicestershire bulfinches, a glow upon his face, his eyes flashing fire, his teeth set, his fingers clinched on the true steel that had done trusty work for him before then among the Indian jungles. On we went. All *I* was conscious of was of a feverish exultation; a wild, causeless delight; a fierce, tiger-like longing to be at them and upon them. The ring of the horses' iron hoofs, the chink of the rattling bits, the dashing of chains and sabers, the whistle and screech of the bullets as they flew among us from the redoubt, all made a music in my ear to which my heart beat with delicious excitement. God knows how it is, but in such hours as that the last thing one thinks of is the death so near at hand. Though men reeled from their saddles and fell lifeless to the ground at every step,

and riderless chargers fled snorting and wounded from our ranks; though the guns from the redoubt poured on us as we swept past, and volleys of rifles and musketry raked our ranks; though every moment great gaps were made, till the fire broke our first line, and the second had to fill it up; though from the thirty guns before us poured a deadly fire, whose murderous balls fell among us as we rode, clearing scores of saddles, sweeping down horses and men, and strewing the plain as we passed with quivering human bodies, and chargers rolling over and over in their death-agony,—on we rode, down into that fiery embrace of smoke and flame that stretched out its arms and hissed its fell kisses at us from the Russian line. His sword whirling and flashing above his head, De Vigne spurred his horse into the dense smoke of the blazing batteries. With a cheer to his men, in that sweet and silvery voice that had whispered such soft love-vows in women's ears, Sabretasche led us in between the guns. Every one was for himself then, as we dashed into the battery and sabered the gunners at their posts, while the oblique fire from the hills, and the direct fire of musketry, poured in upon us. Prodigies of valor were done there never to be chronicled. Twice through the blinding smoke I saw De Vigne beside me—the Charmed Life, as they had called him in India—reckless of the storm of balls that fell about him, sitting in his saddle as firmly as if he were at a Pytchley meet. We had no breathing-time to think of others in that desperate struggle, but once I heard Pigott near me shout out, “The Colonel's down!” Thank God it was not true; down he was, to be sure, for his horse was killed under him by a round shot; but Sabretasche sprang up again in an instant, as calm and collected as though he were pacing the Ring in Hyde Park, vaulted on a riderless charger that was by him, and struck down a gunner the next moment, his face

all the while as pale and as impassive as if he were in a drawing-room at home. That wild *mélée*! I can remember nothing distinctly in it, save the mad thirst for blood that at such a time rises in one as savagely as in a beast of prey. A shot struck my left arm, breaking the bone above my wrist; but I was conscious of no pain as we broke through the column of Russian infantry, sending them flying before us, broken and scattered like thistle-down upon the wind, and were returning from our charge as brilliantly as the Scots and Enniskilleners had returned from theirs, when, as you know, the flank fire from the hill battery opened upon us—an enemy we could not reach or silence—and a mass of Russian Lancers were hurled upon our flank. Shewell and his 8th cut through them—we stayed for an encounter, hemmed in on every side, shrouded—our little handful of men—by the dense columns of their troops. It was hot work, work that strewed the plain with the English Light Brigade, as a harvest-field is strewn with wheat-ears ere the sheaves are gathered. But we should have broken through them still, no matter what the odds, for there were deeds of individual daring done in that desperate struggle which would make the chilliest blood glow, and the most lethargic listener kindle into admiration. We should have cut through them, *coûte que coûte*, but that horrible volley of grape and canister, on which all Europe has cried shame, poured on friend and foe from the gunners who had fled before our charge, the balls singing with their murderous hiss through the air, and falling on the striving mass of human life, where English and Russian fought together, carrying death and destruction with its coward fire into the ranks of both, and stamping the Church-blessed troops of the Czar with ineffaceable infamy.

It was with bitter hearts and deadly thoughts that we,

the remnant of the Six Hundred, rode back, leaving the flower of the Light Brigade dead or dying before those murderous Russian guns;—and it was all done, all over, in five-and-twenty minutes—less than a fox-hunt would have taken at home!

De Vigne was unhurt. The Charmed Life must still have had his spell about him, for if any man in the Cavalry had risked danger and courted death that day he had done so; but he rode out of the lines at Balaklava without even a scratch. Sabretasche had been hit by a ball which had only grazed his shoulder; the delicate and raffiné man of fashion would have laughed at a much more deadly wound. We were not too “fine gentlemen” for *that* work, but rather went through it perhaps the better for having come of a race that for many generations had never “funked,” and bearing names that cowardice or dishonor had never touched. With tears standing in his eyes, Sabretasche looked back one morning to the plain where so many of his Dashers had fallen, torn and mangled in the bloody jaws of those grim batteries, the daring spirits quenched, the vigorous lives spent, the gallant forms food for the worms, and he turned to De Vigne with a mournful smile, “*Cui bono?*”

True indeed—*cui bono?* that waste of heroic human life. There was a bitter significance in his favorite sarcasm, which the potentates, who for their own private ends had drenched the Chersonese in blood, would have found it hard to answer. *Cui bono* indeed! Their bones lie whitening there in the valley of Balaklava; fresh fancies amuse and agitate the nations; the Light Cavalry charge is coldly criticised and pronounced tomfoolery, and their names are only remembered in the hearts of some few women whose lives were desolation when they fell.

III.

THE BRIDAL JEWELS GO TO THE MONT DE PIÉTÉ.

IN their salon in the Champs Elysées, that crowded, gaudy, and much-bedizened room, sat, as they had sat twelve months before, old Fantyre and the Trefusis, the old woman huddled up among a pile of cushions, shawls, and furs, with her feet on a chauffeurette, older and uglier, with her wig awry, and her little piercing black eyes roving about like a monkey's as she drank her accustomed demie tasse, which, as I before observed, looked most suspiciously like cognac undefiled; the younger one, with her coarse, dashing, full-blown, highly-tinted beauty not shown off to the best advantage, for it was quite early morning, madame n'était pas visible, of course, in common with all Parisiennes, whether Parisienne by birth or by adoption; and not being visible, the Trefusis had not thought it worth her while to dress, but hastily enveloped in a peignoir, looked certainly, though she was a fine woman still, not exactly calculated to please the taste of a high-born gentleman used to the sight and the society of delicate aristocrats, (though, truly, before *they* are made up, some of those self-same delicate aristocrats!——but, taissons nous! If we pried into the composition of the entremets at Vé-sours' or the Trois Frères, should we enjoy the dainties of them?)

“Well, my dear, ain't he killed yet?” demanded old Fantyre, in her liveliest treble.

“No,” said the Trefusis, running her eye through the returns of the 25th October. “Major Halkett, Captain Nolan, Lord Fitzgibbon—lots of them—but——”

“Not the right one,” chuckled the old Fantyre, who,

though she had her own private reasons for desiring De Vigne's demise, as his property was so ruled that a considerable portion must have come to his wife whether he had willed it so or not, had still that exquisite pleasure in the Trefusis's mortification which better people than the old Viscountess indulge in now and then at their friends' expense. "Deuce take the man! Tiresome creature it is; shot and saber carry off lots of pretty fellows out there. Why on earth can't they touch him? And that beautiful creature, Vivian Sabretasche, is *he* all right?"

"Slightly wounded—that's all."

"How cross you are, my dear. If you must not wear widow's weeds, I can't help it, can I? They're not becoming, my dear—not at all; though if a woman knows how to manage 'em, she may do a good deal under her crape. Men ain't afraid of a widow as they are of an unmarried woman, though Heaven knows they need be if they knew all; the 'dear departed' 's a capital dodge to secure a new pigeon. Mark my words, my dear, De Vigne won't die just because you wish him!"

"Wish him!" reiterated the Trefusis. "How disagreeably you phrase things, Lady Fantyre."

"Give 'em their right names, my dear? Yes, I believe that is uncommon disagreeable for most people," chuckled the old woman. "In my time, you know, we weren't so particular; if we did naughty things (and we did very many, my dear, almost as many as people do now!) we weren't ashamed to call 'em by their dictionary names. Humbug's a new-fangled thing, as well as a new-fangled word. They say we were coarse; I don't know, I'm sure; I suppose we were; but I know we didn't love things under the rose and sneak out of 'em in daylight as you nineteenth-century people do; our men, if they went to the casinos at night, didn't go to Bible meetings, and Maintenance-of-

Immaculate-Society boards, and Regenerated Magdalens' Refuges the next morning—as they do now-a-days. However, if we were more consistent, we weren't so Christian, I suppose! Lor' bless me, what a deal of cant there is about in the world now! even you, whom I did think was pretty well as unscrupulous as anybody I ever met, won't allow you'd have liked to see De Vigne among them returns. I know when poor old Fantyre died, Lady Rougepot says to me, 'What a relief, my dear!' and I'm sure I never thought of differing from her for a minute! You've never had but one checkmate in your life, Constance—with that little girl Trevelyan—Tressillian—what's her name?"

"Little devil!" said the Trefusis, bitterly; she had not grown the choicest in her expressions, from constant contact with the Fantyre. "I saw her again the other day."

"Here?"

"Yes; in the Rue Vivienne—in a fleuriste's shop. I passed her quite close. She knew me again; I could tell that by the scorn there was in her eyes and the sneer that came on her lips. Little fool! with the marriage certificate before her very eyes, she wouldn't believe the truth. The scheme was so good it deserved complete success. I hate that little thing—such a child as she looks, to have put one down and outgeneraled one's plans."

"Child!" chuckled old Fantyre; "she wasn't so much of a child but what she could give you one of the best retorts I ever heard: 'It was a pity you didn't learn the semblance of a lady to support you in the assumption of your rôle!' Vastly good, vastly good; how delighted Selwyn would have been with that."

"Little devil!" repeated the Trefusis again. "I hate the sight of that girl's great dark-blue eyes. De Vigne shall never see her again if I can help it, little, contemptuous, haughty creature!"

"She's a lady, ain't she?" said the Fantyre, dryly

"I'm sure I don't know. She is as proud as a princess, though she's nothing but an artist after all. Good gracious! Who is that?" said the Trefusis, as she heard a ring at the entrance, giving a hurried dismayed glance at her negligée. "It can't be Anatole nor De Brissac; they never come so early."

"If they do, my dear, beauty unadorned, you know——"

"Stuff!" said the Trefusis, angrily. "Beauty unadorned would get uncommonly few admirers in these days. Perhaps it's nobody for us."

As she spoke a servant entered, and brought her a piece of paper with a few words on it, unfolded and unsealed.

"What's that, my dear?" asked Lady Fantyre, eagerly.

"Only my dressmaker," said the Trefusis, with affected carelessness, but with an uneasy frown, which did not escape the quick old lady.

"Dressmaker!" chuckled the Fantyre, as she was left alone. "If you've any secrets from me, my dear, we shall soon quarrel. I've no objection whatever to living with you as long as you have that poor fellow's three thousand a year, and we can make a tidy little income with you to attract the young men, and me to play whist and écarté with 'em; but if you begin to hold any cards I don't see I shall throw up the game, though we have played it some time together."

While old Fantyre—who had this single virtue among all her vices, that she was candid about them, more than can be said of most sinners—thus talked to herself over her cognac and coffee, the Trefusis had gone, demi-toilette and all, into the salle, where there awaited her a neat, slight, fair man, with a delicate badine and gold studs, who looked something between a valet, an actor,

and a would-be dandy—such as you may see by scores any day in Oxford Street, or on the Boulevards, hanging about the Bads, or lounging in the parterre of the Odéon.

He smiled, a curious, slight smile, as the Trefusis entered.

“*Vous voila, madame!* Not en grande tenue to-day; too early for your pigeons, I suppose? I dare say you and the old lady make a very good thing out of it, though of course you only entertain immaculate society, for fear you should give the Major a chance to bring you up before a certain law court, eh?”

“What did you come for so soon again?” demanded the Trefusis, abruptly, with as scant courtesy as might be. “I have only five minutes to spare, you had better not waste it in idle talk.”

“What do I come for, *ma belle*? Now, what *should* I come for? What do I ever come for, pray?” returned her visitor, in nowise displeased, but rather amused at her annoyance.

“Money!” retorted the Trefusis, with an angry glare. “You will get none to-day, I can assure you!”

The man laughed.

“Now why always keep up this little farce? Money I wish for—money you will give me. Why make the same amusing little denial of it every time?”

“It is no amusing little denial to-day, at all events,” said the Trefusis, coldly. “I have none left. I cannot give you what I have not.”

He laughed, and played a tattoo with the cornehan head of his cane.

“Very well, then I will go to the Major.”

“You cannot. He is in the Crimea.”

“To the Crimea I can go to-morrow, *belle amie*. in the service of a gentleman who has a fancy to visit it. But I

am tired of playing the valet, though it is amusing enough sometimes; and, indeed, as you pay so very badly, I have been thinking of writing to De Vigne; he will give me anything I ask, for my information."

The Trefusis's eyes grew fiercer, but she turned pale and wavered.

"A line of mine will tell the Major, you know, *belle amie*—and the crime is actionable—and I don't fancy he will be inclined to be very gentle to his wife—*née* Lucy Davis, eh?" he went on, amused to watch the changes on her face. He will pay very highly, too—what are a few thousands to him?—he is as lavish as the winds, as proud as the devil, and, hating *Mme. sa femme* as he does, he will give me, I have no doubt, anything I ask. It will be a much better investment for me; I won't trouble you any more, Lucy; I shall write to the Major at once."

He rose, and took his hat; but the Trefusis interrupted him.

"Stay—wait a moment—how much do you want?"

"Fifty pounds now, and as much this day week."

"Impossible! I have not half——"

"Glad to hear it, *madame*. The Major will be the much better paymaster. With his thousands I can get a life annuity, buy stock, take shares, do what I like, even—who knows?—become an eminently respectable member of society! Adieu! *belle amie*; when we next meet it will be in the law courts over the water."

"Villain!" swore the Trefusis, with a fierce flash of her black eyes.

He laughed:

"Not at all; you have the monopoly of any villainy there may be in the transaction. Adieu! what shall I say from you to the Major—any tender message?"

"Wait," cried the Trefusis, hurriedly. "I have five napé

—I could let you have more to-morrow; and—you could take one of my bracelets——”

“One! No, thank you, the other plan will be best for me. I am tired of these installments, and De Vigne——”

“But—my diamonds, then—the ceinture he was fool enough to give me——” She tried to speak coldly, but there was a trembling eagerness in her manner which belied her assumed calmness.

“Fool, indeed!—and to think he was a man of the world! Your diamonds!—ma chère, you must be in strange fear, indeed, to offer me them. They must be worth no end, or they would not be the Major’s giving. Those bracelets he bought for the Little Tressillian cost a hundred the pair, I know: splendid emeralds they were! he thought I never saw them, but they laid five minutes on his dressing-table before he sealed them up. He was always careless in those things: I believe, aristocrat as he was, he thought servants had neither eyes nor ears, instead of having them, in point of fact, just doubly acute. Well,” he went on—he had only made this lengthened digression to annoy his listener—“Well, come, let us look at those diamonds—I am willing to spare you, if I can, for old acquaintance sake.”

When he left the house he carried with him that magnificent diamond ceinture which De Vigne had bought, in his lover’s madness, for his bride nine years before, and took it up to the Mont de Piété. Three thousand a year was not a bad income, but the Trefusis’s dress, the Fantyre’s wines, the petits soupers, and the numerous Paris agréments and amusements ran away with it very fast, and though écarté, vingt-et-un, and whist added considerably to their resources, the Trefusis was very often hard up, as people who have lived on their wits all their lives not unfrequently are. One would fancy such sharpening upon the grindstone of

want might teach them economy in prosperity; but I don't think it often does; the canaille ever glory in the vulgar pride of money, waste hundreds in grand dinners, and—grudge the pineapple. Besides, the Trefusis, too, had a drain on her exchequer, of which the world and even Argus-eyed old Fantyre was ignorant.

PART THE TWENTIETH.

I.

HOW DE VIGNE MARRED HIS OWN FATE A SECOND TIME.

WINTER in the Crimea—the Crimea of 1854–55. The very words are enough to bring up again to one that sharp, stinging wind, of whose concentrated cold none can imagine in the faintest degree, save those who have weathered a winter in tents on the barren steppes before Sebastopol. Writing those very words is enough to bring up before one the bleak, chill, dark stretch of ground, with its horrible roads turned to water-courses, or frozen like miles of broken glass; the slopes, vast morasses of mud and quagmire, or trackless wastes of snow; the hurricane, wild as a tropical tornado, whirling the tents in mid-air, and turning men and horses roofless into the terrible winter night; the long hours of darkness, of storm, of blinding snow, of howling wind, of pouring ink-black rain, in which the men in the trenches and the covering parties and pickets watched with eyes that must never close and senses that might never weary; the days when under those pitiless skies officers and men shared alike the common fate, worse clad than a beggar, worse cared for than a cab-horse;—all rise up be-

fore one as by incantation at those mere words, Winter in the Crimea.

I need not dwell upon it; I read the other day that people had heard quite enough of the "undivine story" of the Russian war. I scarcely know what that epithet may mean; wars never, that I am aware of, set up for being "divine;" but if we could boast but little divinity among us, (and I think the "most eminently pious person" would have been tempted to swear hard had such a one been present to enjoy the hurricane of the 14th of November,) I fancy the men showed what was better and more to the purpose—heroism true and dauntless; the heroism most difficult of all in life—the heroism of endurance. I think one can want nothing nobler, or so far more "divine," than Tom Trowbridge, with his legs upon the gun-carriage, refusing to move "till the battle's won;" or Strangway's gentle "Will any one be kind enough to lift me off my horse?" than the steady work in the trenches in ten hours of furious rain and freezing cold; work done day after day, night after night, turning out into the mire and misery of the traverses with hungry stomachs and clothes that were rags?

My left arm turned out so tedious and tiresome that I was obliged to go down to Balaklava for a short time. The day before I went up again to the front, anxious, you are sure, to be with the Dashers as soon as ever I could, a transport came into harbor with a reinforcement of the —th from England. I watched them land; their fresh, healthy faces, their neat uniforms, their general trim, and all-over-like-going look, contrast enough to the men in the trenches at the front; and as I was looking at them disembark I saw a face I knew well, indeed—the face fair and delicate as a girl, with his long light curls and his blue eyes, and his lithe slight figure, of Curly, our little Curly

of Frestonhills. Twelve months before, as I have said, Curly had changed from his captaincy in the Coldstreams to the lieutenant-colonelcy of the —th, and had been savage enough at having done so when the Household Troops went out to the Crimea; but now his turn had come, to his own unspeakable satisfaction, for Curly had always longed to have a taste of that real campaigning which De Vigne had invariably passionately assured us was the sole good thing in life. We met as old friends did meet out there, doubly bound together by a common cause, and we had a long haver that night, over pipes and some of the pure cognac he had brought out with him to the land where brandy, like everything else, was filthy, adulterated, and fabulously priced; of mutual acquaintance and topics of mutual interest; of the things that had been done in England since we left, and the things we had done ourselves in the Chersonese. Knowing nothing of those fierce words which had passed between Curly and De Vigne, I was surprised at the silence with which Curly listened to my details of the heroic pluck with which our Frestonhills hero had cut his way through the Russian squadrons on the morning of the 25th; knowing nothing, either, of the wild love which had entered into them both for the same woman, I set my foot in it unawares by asking him if he had seen the Little Tressillian before he left. Curly, though Heaven knows life had seasoned him as it had seasoned us all, till our faces could be as silent and impassive under the most stinging mental pain as any soulless, bloodless statue's, busied himself with poking up his pipe, while a flush rose over his fair girlish brow, and the muscles of his lips twitched nervously, as he answered simply, "No!"

"No! What, didn't you even go to bid her good-by? I thought you admired that little thing beyond expression,

though she used to compliment Sir Folko at your and my expense? Do you mean to say you never went down to St. Crucis before you came off here?"

"For Heaven's sake, Arthur, hold your tongue!" said Curly, more sharply than I had ever heard him speak; he who, when Poultney Hay had forged the check in his name for 500*l.*, had begged us not to be hard on "the poor dear fellow," and had busied himself in hushing the matter up as anxiously as though he were the criminal. "It is grossest brutality to jest on such a subject."

"Brutality to ask after the Little Tressillian?" I repeated, in sheer amazement. "My dear fellow, what on earth do you mean? What has happened to Alma? Is she dead?"

"Would to Heaven she were, rather than what they say she is: another added to Vane Castleton's list of victims!"

The anguish in his voice was unmistakable. I stared at him in amazement. The Little Tressillian gone over to Vane Castleton! That girl whose face was truth, and innocence, and candor in itself; who had seemed never happy save in De Vigne's presence; who had lavished on him whenever she saw him such fond, enthusiastic words, with all a woman's eloquence and all a child's abandon! I stared at him in mute bewilderment. The bursting of Whistling Dick between us at that moment would not have startled or astonished me more.

"Alma—Vane Castleton! My dear Curly, there must be some mistake."

"God knows!" he answered between his teeth. "*I* do not credit it, yet there are the facts: She has left St. Crucis; her nurse saw her leave in Castleton's brougham, and she has never returned. She must have been deluded away; she never could have gone willingly. He may have lured her with a false marriage. God knows! women are

sometimes dazzled by rank, and he is bad enough for anything. I should have found him out to know the truth, and shot him dead if he had beguiled her away against her will, but I never heard of it until the very day before we sailed. I could not leave my regiment at the eleventh hour."

"Do you care so much for her, then?" I said, involuntarily, in surprise; for, though I knew Curly had often sworn the Little Tressillian was the most charming thing he had ever come across, he had lavished equally enthusiastic epithets on no end of other women, and I never dreamt he had felt anything deeper for her.

"I loved her very dearly," said Curly, simply, with his pipe between his lips. "Don't talk of it again, Arthur, please; she cared nothing for me, but her name is too precious to me to hear it mentioned without respect, and I am sure there is some error yet. I will never believe her face told a lie."

He was silent; and since the loss of Alma had stung him so keenly and so deeply that not even the elasticity of his gay, light, affectionate nature could rebound or recover from it, it was easy to understand how it had overwhelmed De Vigne's stronger, more fiery, more vehement, and far more retentive nature, if, as I doubted not, the love that Sabretasche had predicted had come between himself and the Little Tressillian.

The fierce words that had passed between them were not forgotten. De Vigne was not a man to forgive in a moment that bitter accusation of cowardice, which no one but Curly would have breathed to him without receiving punishment, whose mark he would have carried on him all his life. Curly, with reasons of his own for believing that, true or untrue, the story of Alma's flight with Vane Castleton, the heart of the woman he loved was De Vigne's,

and De Vigne's alone, sought no reconciliation with his once idolized Frestonhills hero. Perhaps he harbored a suspicion—unjust indeed, but men in love and jealous of their rivals seldom pause to do them justice—that it was to Granville, and not to Vane Castleton, Alma had flown, for he knew De Vigne was so thorough a soldier that he would have left the most exquisite happiness, or the woman he most tenderly loved, at any call to arms. They seldom met—De Vigne being in Lord Lucan's camp, and Curly in that of the Light Division—and they avoided each other by mutual consent. The love of woman had come between them, and stretched like a great gulf between De Vigne and the young fellow he had liked ever since he was a little fair-haired, bright-eyed boy.

Curly came just in time for that gray wintry dawn, when the bells of Sebastopol rang through the dark, foggy air, and the dense masses of troops, for whom mass had been said, stole through the falling rain up the heights of the valley of Inkermann. He was in time for those hand-to-hand struggles—those wild assaults, those daring repulses, with which, in glen, and glade, and valley, in separate knots and remote corners, amid thick rain and tangled brushwood, and thorny brakes and foggy gloom, through which they could see neither enemy nor friend—in which the steady heroism of England and the dashing gallantry of France repelled the picked troops of the Muscovite, stimulated by brandy, assured of victory by their Czar's son, and promised the best joys of Heaven by their priests if they should fall. He was in time to rush to the front with the rest of the Light Division on that dark and desperate morning, when the Duke and his Guards held the Sandbag Battery under the deadly mitraille and the volleys of rifle and musketry; when officers dropped like hail, singled out, as they ever are, in the onslaught; when Cath-

cart fell with the bullet through his brain, and Sir George Brown was carried wounded off the field, and the Zouaves dashed to the rescue at their merry *Pas de charge*, and the Chasseurs d'Afrique, on their gray Arabs, charged with all the brilliance and elan of their nation; and all through the dark, gloomy valley raged those fierce struggles, those desperate rallies, those sanguinary combats hand to hand, which made up the battle of Inkermann, and strewed the wet, marshy ground with groups, under every bush and in every ravine, of the bearskins of our Guards, the gray great-coats of the Russians, and the bright-blue uniforms of the Chasseurs, the men lying *pêle-mêle* together as they had fallen in the death-grapple—some calm, tranquil, with their lips just open as the rifle had hit them down, life ceasing instantaneously; others horrible to look upon, with every feature wrung in the agonies of their last throes clinching the grass they had torn up in their suffering as existence had passed slowly, unwillingly, agonizingly away.

Curly was in time for Inkermann—that battle where not twenty thousand English and French repulsed fifty thousand or more Russians, which was heroic as Thermopylæ, sanguinary as Maya; and he was in time for the winter work in the trenches, where he, so late the young Adonis of the Guards, the “best style” in the Park, the fashionable young blondin, the darling of Belgravian boudoirs, who at home never began his day till two o'clock—a day of morning calls, of *déjeûners*, of flirtations, of gay mess-luncheons, of gayer opera-suppers, with his dinners perfection, with his wines of the best, and his greatest exertion to get up in time for Epsom, or cram all his engagements into one night—had to turn into the trenches in rain which made the traverses like Dutch dykes, or in blinding snow blown into his eyes by a wind that cut into him sharply as any bayonet's thrust; to come back to a

tent without fire, to food either semi-raw or else burnt black as a cinder; to sleep rudely, roused by a hurricane that whirled away his sole frail shelter, and turned him out into the bitter black Crimean night. That winter showed us campaigning with the gloss off; there were no marches through pleasant countries, no halts at villages or towns, no billeting in different places, where there was change of scene, and wine, and pretty women, as our fathers and grandfathers had had in the Peninsula; no brilliant succession of battles, the space between each filled up with the capture of fallen cities, and balls and love-making in friendly ones, such as make the history of the war among the green sierras of Spain so favorite a theme for fiction and romance; there was nothing but an eternal cannonading from the dawn of one day to the dawn of another—nothing but a long, dreary, protracted siege, and confinement to a camp, to get away from which a reconnoissance party was hailed with delight—nothing but months dragging away one after another, seeing horses and men dying off by scores.

We should soon have been dismounted if we had not been ordered into Balaklava—our light sinewy, fiery, gallant grays lay rotting in heaps, or stiffened and frozen in the mud. The first thing that seemed to soften the stern, silent gloom that had gathered round De Vigne was when his horse, Sultan, that followed him like a dog and took sugar from his hand, and that had brought him safe out of the lines at Balaklava, weakened with starvation and frozen with cold, turned his dying eyes upon his master, shivered, rolled on his side, and died with one last faint gasping sigh. It was the only thing he thought that loved him, and De Vigne loved it in return; the gray had been a truer friend than man, a more faithful one than woman. He stooped over the horse where he lay and kissed him on the fore-

head, and his eyes were dim as he turned away from the dead charger that had served him so long and had died so painfully—token that, despite the ice that his cruel wrong and his great anguish had closed around him, the warm loving heart of the man was still beating strong within him. The sufferings of his men around him, too—the men who all braved that winter, never despaired, rarely complained, and kept stout hearts through all their unspeakable wretchedness, their extremity of misery, while England seemed to forget and to neglect them;—absorbed as De Vigne was by that passionate and bitter love which had cost him so dear, he exerted himself to the utmost to alleviate these sufferings, and it was well for him that he was forced from himself into the midst of the misery around him. He was furious that the army should be left to suffer and rot here, while in England they persisted in believing that we had all we could possibly want. If by paying down all his fortune he could have brought to the Crimea the huts, the warm clothing, the medicines, the supplies, the reserves of strong able-bodied regiments that we wanted, I believe he would have done it without pain or regret. As it was, where the commonest necessities became luxuries scarcely to be bought at the most extravagant prices, he could do little or nothing. As it was, he had to stand by and see men and horses dying away for simple lack of care and shelter; the flower of that army wasted, which—a soldier's son—he loved as devotedly as Quintus Curtius Rome; holding his own life as nothing could he by any personal sacrifice have given any aid or added any glory to the Service, caring nothing as long as he had opportunity to do his best, and justice done his regiment, whether his own deeds were unnoticed or rewarded with a line in the *Gazette*. He did all he could to cheer and animate the men, and they listened to him as to a demi-god, rever-

ing him for those slashing back-handed strokes which had cut his way for him through the carnage at Balaklava, and having a sort of superstitious belief in his Indian sobriquet of the "Charmed Life." The exertions which his devotion to the Service impelled him to, did him a certain good—it roused him a little from the dead gloom which had closed around him; the sufferings he saw and could not aid, not those of wounds and death—to such he was accustomed—but the sufferings of disease which common aid might have prevented; of privations excelling those of beggars, which he justly thought a disgrace to an age of civilization and luxury—these, to a certain extent softened that harsh and bitter indifference to every living thing which had grown upon him, and the *reality* of the life he led awoke him in a degree from his own thoughts; while at the same time the weary inactivity of the siege, which weighed down even the lightest hearts before Sebastopol, was but one long torture to a man who longed for danger and excitement as the sole anodyne to a passion which pursued him as the Furies pursued Orestes.

Those who knew Sabretasche as we had known him, the luxurious owner of the luxurious Dilcoosha; as the fastidious man of fashion, of art, of taste, whose senses were so refined at once by nature and by indulgence, that he shrank from everything that was not the highest perfection of refinement, as the young Mozart shrank from a discordant chord and fainted at the harsh notes of a horn—those who knew as I did that all his life long there had been no elegance, no beauty he had not gathered round him to shut out the coarser and harsher material world, would have wondered at the simple uncomplaining heroism with which he bore deprivations and discomforts, at the mere recital of which he would have shuddered and turned away twelve months before, asking you, with his soft low laugh, "Not

to jar on his feelings with such distressing and distasteful details!" Many of those who had sneered (behind his back) at his Sybaritism, bore the miseries of that Crimean winter far less uncomplainingly and gallantly than the high-bred gentleman who came from the heart of the most refined luxury, with all his aristocrat's habits, his artist's tastes, his inborn fastidiousness, into greater privation, discomfort, and wretchedness, than any not present there can imagine, to endure a campaign, where the wild Chersonese hurricane turned him out at night, shelterless, to the full fury of the storm; where his food was often such as at home he would have forbidden to be given to his Newfoundland; where his servant had sometimes to fight with another for some scanty brushwood to light his fire; where loathsome centipedes crawled over his very bed; where he had to wade through mud, and rain, and filth, over paths marked out by the sick and dying fallen by the roadside, and the carrion birds whirling aloft over the spot where the corpses lay. Yet I never heard him utter a complaint, except, indeed, when he turned to me with a smile:

"How horrible it is, Arthur, not to be able to wash one's hands!"

The winter in the Chersonese was contrast enough to the life of love, and luxury, and joy he had painted with all the brilliance of his poet's mind, all the tenderness of his lover's heart, sitting in Violet Molyneux's boudoir, looking into the loving, radiant eyes of the woman who should now have been his wife! He was uniformly gentle and kind to those with whom he came in contact; his very delicacy and extreme sensitiveness, joined to his proud hatred of anything like pity or discussion, made him hide as much as was possible the deadly grief he carried with him day and night. Sometimes he would exert himself to talk in something of his old strain, though he never affected

to conceal that he had lost all in losing her; and beneath the sad, grave gentleness of his manner, it was easy to see how bitterly his heart was aching—aching with that dull, hopeless anguish for which time has no cure. One night, just before we were ordered into Balaklava, a friend of his, a member of the Lower House, who had come out to have a look at the Crimea, and was staying on board one of the vessels in the harbor, was dining with Sabretasche—De Vigne, a French colonel of cavalry, whom Sabretasche had known in Paris, a man of the 9th Lancers, and myself, making up the party. All of us thought of the Colonel's charming dinners in Park Lane or the Dilcoosha; of his rare wines, his exquisite cookery, his noiseless servants, his perfect appointments, his choice company—the best wits the greatest authors, the men of highest ton, as we sat down to this, the best money could procure, and miraculously luxurious for the Crimea—a turkey, some preserved beef, and a little jam, with some brandy and whisky, for which his man had paid a price you would not believe, if I recorded it parole d'honneur.

"I am equally glad to see you, Carlton," said Sabretasche, "but I'm afraid I can't entertain you quite so well as I did in Park Lane. Il faut manger pour vivre, else I fancy you would hardly be inclined to touch much of anything we can give you in the Crimea."

"Peste, Sabretasche! il ne pensera guère à cela; nous avons ici la meilleure chose—notre Amphitryon," said De Courcy-Reynal, with a warmth that meant more than mere Parisian courtesy.

"Quite true, monsieur," said Carlton, "Sabretasche's wines *were* perfection, but they were not what made those 'little dinners' of his the most delightful things in town. I wonder when we shall have you back among us, Colonel?"

"Not till we've given the Muscovites such a thrashing

as they'll never get over," said Egerton of the 9th—those dashing Lancers who were cut up at Balaklava almost to a man; which remark was a prelude to such a discussion of tactics, probabilities, justice and injustice, what had been done that shouldn't have been done, and what hadn't been done that should have been done, with all the different versions of the Light Cavalry charge, as was certain to take place where there were five cavalry men talking, and an amateur who wanted to hear everything we had to tell him.

"You're quite a héros de roman, De Vigne, in England," laughed Carlton. "Lady Puffdoff and scores of your old loves are gone more mad about you than ever, and have been working their snowy fingers to the bone over all sorts of wool things for you and the rest of the Dashers, that are now tumbling about in the holds, and will rot in Balaklava harbor, I suppose, till the hot weather comes."

"Héros de roman!" said De Vigne, with his most contemptuous sneer. "If the people at home would just believe the men are dying away here, more than three thousand sick in camp, and would provide for them with just a little common practical sense, instead of sending us unroasted coffee, and stoves that may kill the fellows as they killed poor Smeaton of the Artillery, and letting the warm clothing rot in the holds, and the huts go to pieces on the beach, they'd do us more service than by writing ballads about us, and showering poetical epithets on us that they'll forget in twelve months' time, when they are running after some new hobby."

De Vigne spoke prophetically!

"But you still like campaigning, despite it all, old fellow?" asked Carlton.

"I wish my life could be one long campaign," said De Vigne, his eyes flashing with something besides even his

love for the Service; then he laughed, as he went on, "I" I were a medical man, and had to deal with hypochondriacs, frenzied poets, nervous littérateurs, or worn-out public men, I would send them all off to active service. Boot and Saddle would soon have all the nonsense out of them, and send them back much healthier and better fellows. Campaigning is the only thing to put a dash of cayenne pepper into the soup of life."

"Our cayenne gets rather damped here," smiled Sabretasche. "I remember when I was five-and-twenty, and lounged down the shady side of Pall Mall, I thought nothing would be so pleasant as a hot campaign in India; and when I had had five years of hot campaigning, I thought nothing would be so pleasant as the shady side of Pall Mall. It *was* very agreeable as far as the danger and excitement went, but I confess I preferred my house in Park Lane to a tent for continuous residence. I missed my studio—to sketch with the thermometer at 130 was simply impossible. I had plenty of models, but no marble, no chisel, and no time. I missed my *Times*, my reading-chair, my periodicals, my papers; above all, society. All these are great agréments of life."

"But confess, Colonel, weren't you less fastidious and less dandified after India than before?" asked De Vigne.

"I never was much of a dandy. I dress well, of course; any man of good taste does that by simple instinct. As for fastidiousness, I managed with a shirt a week in India, because I couldn't have more; but I hated it, and had one or two per diem as soon as ever I went back. I let my beard grow there because I had no possible time to have it shaved; but I was delighted to have it off again as soon as ever I reached Calcutta——"

"Nonsense! What are shirts or beards, compared with the *verve*, the excitement, the reality of existence that

one finds in active service? I remember one night, when I was riding through a hilly pass in Lahore, with only my man Niel with me, we were set upon by half a dozen mountain robbers, some ten miles north of Attock, where the road, shelving on a precipice, wasn't more than twenty paces wide. I shot one of the devils dead, the other revolver flashed in the pan, and poor Niel rolled over the precipice, carrying his foe with him, in their death-grapple. There was I, single-handed against those four brutes, and I never enjoyed anything better."

"Of course. How did it end?"

"Oh! in nothing wonderful," continued De Vigne. "I set my back against the rock and defended myself as well as I could. I ran one of them through the body, and before I could draw my sword out one of them sent his spear into my wrist. I've the mark of it now. That put up my blood. I pitched one poor wretch over the rock; another turned and fled, yelling out it must be that cursed Feringhee, the 'Charmed Life,' it was no use trying to kill me; and I held the last, and gave him such a drubbing with the flat side of my saber that I left him there prostrate, and utterly unconscious to anything that happened. My horse had been grazing quietly, I caught him easily, and galloped back to Attock considerably elated, I assure you. Could a soiless shirt and a smooth chin outweigh an hour of real life like that?"

"Certainly not. If our days here were all twenty-fifths of October, they would be too delightful," said Sabretasche, with that sad smile which, when he exerted himself to be cheerful, showed how painful and unreal the effort was. "All I say is, my dear Granville, that I do prefer an Auxerre carpet to this extremely perilous mud; that I do like much better to have nice hot water and almond soap, to being only able to wash my hands at very distant inter-

vals. It would be ridiculous to pretend that I don't think a dinner at the Star and Garter more palatable than this tough turkey; nor my usual Bond Street coats more agreeable to wear than these ragged and nondescript garments!"

"And yet one has never heard a word of complaint from that fellow from our first bivouac till now!" said De Vigne to Carlton. Granville had an evident attachment to the Colonel, strengthened, if possible, by the uncomplaining courage and gallantry with which, in common with almost all there, the man of fashion and refinement bore every deprivation.

"*Cui bono?*" smiled Sabretasche. "It all comes in the fortune of war, and it is a soldier's duty to take whatever turns up, whether it is exactly to his taste or not. Besides, there is not a murmur heard out here; the Dashers will hardly set the example! Come, Carlton, you have not told us half the news."

Carlton told us plenty of news: of marriages and deaths; intrigues of the boudoir and the cabinet; of who had won the Grand Military, and who was favorite for the Cesarewitch—that race due to the Romanoff, whose forces lay in the great city we besieged; of how Dunbar had married Ela Ashburnham, and Jack Mortimer's wife run away with his groom; of how Fitzturf had been outlawed for seventy thousand, and Monteith made a pot of money at the October meetings; of all the odds and ends of the chat, on dits, scandales, and gossip he had brought from the lobby, the clubs, and the drawing-room; of that set of which we were members.

"I say; De Vigne," said he, at the last, "do you remember that bewitching Little Tressillian that was at the ball in Lowndes Square, and that all the men went so mad about? You knew her very well, though, didn't you?"

Carlton had never heard of the extreme intimacy be-

tween De Vigne and Alma, and never guessed on what dangerous ground he trod; Sabretasche had gone back in thought to that ball in Lowndes Square, where life and love had smiled so sweetly on him; I longed to check him, but I could not; even by the feeble lamplight I could see De Vigne's face grow crimson with the blood that leapt into it; then a gray, ashy paleness grew over it, all hue of color leaving his very lips. He had need then of his iron nerve.

"What of her?"

Carlton never noticed the chill stern tone of those brief words, hissed rather than spoken between his set teeth.

"What of her? Only that people say she levanted with that cursed fool, Vane Castleton. I pity her if she did! But she won't be the first woman idiot enough to have believed him. I fancy it's true, too, because as I came through Paris—where I know he is—on my way here, I saw her in a carriage in the Champs Elysées that was waiting at a door—a very dashing carriage, too. I didn't know her enough to speak to her, but I recognized her blue eyes in a second—it's a face you can't forget. I should have thought she'd been a nicer little thing than that, wouldn't you? But, bless you, women are all alike."

De Vigne sat quite still without moving a muscle, but I knew all he felt by the iron rigidity, the death like pallor of his face, for I had seen it on his marriage-day. Happily for him, at that moment an orderly came to the door with a dispatch from headquarters to Sabretasche, and De Vigne, rising, bid us good night, and went out into the storm of pitiless, drenching, driving rain to seek his own tent.

Those two men had chatted over the tough turkey and the brandy, listening and laughing as though no curse were gnawing at their heart-strings; yet when he was alone

Sabretasche took from his breast a little miniature that, when his horse went down at Balaklava, had swung loose from his uniform by its gold cable-chain, and that he had stopped, even in the midst of that wild work, with the balls whistling around him, to put safely back in its resting-place—a miniature he had painted in the earliest days of their engagement, Violet's lovely face, half laughing, half tender, turned over her shoulder, and looking at him with those fond soft eyes, into which Heaven knew whether he might ever look again; and over the senseless ivory, which seemed to give her back to him in cruel and mocking semblance, Sabretasche bowed his head in bitterness unspeakable at the thought of that life-long barrier which stood ruthlessly between them. And De Vigne, whose iron nerve his comrades envied, and whose strength his enemies feared, groped his way through the storm and the darkness, insensible to the wild battle of wind and rain, and entering his own tent dizzily and unconsciously as though he had been suddenly stricken with blindness, threw himself forward on his narrow bed with one wild prayer from his breaking heart, "My God! my God! that I could die!"

The next morning a mail came in, (our own letters were lying in a heap at the tumble-down British post-office, where we posted them, often with very little hope that they would find their way to their destinations :) there were some from Violet, I think, by the flush that rose on the Colonel's impassive face as he received his epistles, and there were more than a dozen for De Vigne, some from men who really liked him, and with whom *hors de vue* was not always *hors d'esprit*; some from Leila Puffdoff, and women of her genre, who liked to write to one of the most distinguished men of the famous Light Brigade, to whom in days gone by they had used to make love. He read them *pour s'amuser*. The last he took up struck him keener than a

saber's thrust—it was in Alma Tressillian's handwriting. Twenty-four hours before how eagerly he would have seized it, hoping against hope for a reassurance of that love which alone made life of value to him; an explanation of that mystery which had robbed him so strangely and suddenly of her. But now, so skeptical of all good, so credulous of all evil, as he had grown, he never for a moment doubted, or dreamed of doubting, Carlton's story. Circumstantial evidence damned her, and with that mad haste which had cost him so much all his life long, without waiting or pausing, but allowing her no trust, no justice, not even a hearing, as he tore her letter open, for the moment with a wild and suffocating hope trembling at his heart; he flung it from him, with an oath and a groan, as he saw its heading, "No. 100, Champs Elysées, Paris." It was confirmation only too strong of Carlton's tale for him to doubt it. Going, as people often do from one extreme to the other, he who had been in his early youth far too trusting, was now in his manhood equally far too skeptical. Over-confidence had lost him his liberty; over-doubt now lost him his love. A folly one way had tied him to the Trefusis; a folly in another way now robbed him of Alma.

"He has deserted her, and she turns to me to befool me a second time!" was the mad thought with which he flung her letter from him. It was a cruel, an unjust, an ungenerous suspicion; though appearances might tell against her, he had no right to condemn her unheard; her lips had never lied to him; her eyes had never fallen beneath his most searching gaze; he had never heard from her an indelicate thought, a coarse word, a feeling that was not noble, high, and true; he had no right, unheard, to condemn her as the most artful, the most heartless, the most unprincipled actress and intriguante. How he *could*

think it, with the memory of her fond, frank affection; after the interchange of thought and opinion that had passed so long between them, I cannot imagine. His only excuse is, that he was well-nigh mad at the time, and knew not what he did while the agony of disbelief was on him; his grief was a wild delirium, from which his skepticism excluded every possibility of hope, and in which, in the first sting of agony at his betrayal, he sealed her letter again without reading it, and directed it back to her before his purpose should fail him. So, in our madness, we fling our happiness away! One letter still remained unread, indeed unnoticed, in the torrent of emotion awakened by the sight of Alma Tressillian's writing, which De Vigne never saw until he took it up to light his pipe late that night; then he opened it mechanically, glanced over it, saw the signature was "Your humble servant, Charles Raymond," the valet whom he had discharged for reading Alma's little note in Gloucester Place: "A begging letter, of course," thought De Vigne, too heart-sick with his own anguished thoughts to pay more heed to it, as he struck a match, held it in the flame, and lighted his meerschaum with it.

So we throw aside, as valueless cards, the honors life deals us in its uncertain whist.

II.

THE GAZELLE IN THE TIGER'S FANGS.

VANE CASTLETON had gone mad about Alma. I do not mean that he loved her, as poor Curly did, well enough to marry her; nor as De Vigne, who would have thrown everything away to win her; but he was wild about her as very heartless men, cheres demoiselles, can be wild about

a face that has bewitched them. He was first of all fascinated by those "beaux yeux bleus;" then he was piqued by the wish to rival De Vigne, whom he disliked for some sharp sayings Granville had sometimes thrown carelessly at him; then, he was maddened by Alma's contemptuous treatment of him—certainly she *was* very provocative, with her eyes flashing angrily, and her soft, child-like lips curled in haughty yet petulant annoyance; and at last he swore to go there no more, to be treated de haut en bas by "that bewitching little devil," but to win her, coûte que coûte. She might hate him, he did not care for that; he did not think, with Montaigne, that a conquest, to be of value, must be de bonne volonté on the part of the captured; and if he had been in the East he would have sent his slaves, had her blindfolded, and kept her in his seraglio, without regard as to whether tears or smiles were the consequence. Not being able to act so summarily, he—feeling certain that he should never win her of her own free will, for Alma's dislike to him was undisguised, and long years before he had entered the lists with De Vigne and been cut down, as most men were in that sort of game, by Granville, and the House of Tiara having been, from time immemorial, as eccentric as Wharton and as unscrupulous as the Mohawks—he hit upon a plan seemingly more fitted for by-gone days than for our practical and prosaic age, where police prevent all escapades, and telegraphs anticipate all dénouements. But the more eccentric the thing the more pleasure was it to Castleton, who had something of the vanity of Sedley, and liked to set the town talking of his bad deeds, as other men liked to make it gossip of their great ones; he liked to out-Herod Herod, and his reputation for unscrupulous vice was as dear to him as though it had been the fame of the soldier or the statesman: he loved his mere approach to damn a woman's char-

acter à la Caligula, and if he could win Alma by some plot which would increase his notoriety—tant mieux !

On the morrow of De Vigne's declaration of love to her, Alma sat in her bay-window, waiting to catch the first faint music of his horse's hoofs upon the highway. She had done nothing that morning; her easel had lost all charm for her; Sylvo and Pauline obtained but little attention; and after she had filled the room with flowers to give him a brighter welcome, singing soft yet wild Italian barcarolles and love songs while she gathered them, till the goldfinches and the thrushes strained their throats to rival her, she threw herself down on the steps of the window, only guarded from the noontide sun by the chestnut-boughs, to watch for her lover's coming, full of that feverish, impassioned joy which can scarcely credit its own being. To Violet Molyneux happiness came as the meridian sunlight comes after the bright dawn, a deeper gold, indeed, but still only an intensifying of the sunrays that had gilded her cloudless life before. To Alma, accustomed to a solitary, thoughtful, and intellectual childhood with Boughton Tresillian, taught sorrow by his death, and trial by the almost destitution from which her talent alone had rescued her, leading a lonely and—but for her great gift, the elasticity of her spirits, and the resources of her own mind—a sad life for so young and lively a girl, it came like the burst of a Southern sunset, rising in all its deep-hued glories, its purple, and crimson, and golden splendor, passing the pomp of emperors; out of the funereal gloom of tempest-clouds, bathing all the earth that lay quivering from the death-grip of the storm in its own radiant and voluptuous light. At all times impressionable and enthusiastic—readily touched into happiness by the smallest ray of pleasure, as a sun-flower will turn at the first beam after a shower—the rapturous joy which had banished sleep,

but given her waking thoughts sweeter than any night-dreams, seemed to her now too great for reality. Under her gayety and child-like abandon there were vehement passions, the heritage of that Italian blood which Bough-ton Tressillian had said flowed in her veins; her warmth and impatience of nature were the traits of her character akin to De Vigne's, and those few hours with him yesterday had aroused all the impassioned affections which had been but half conscious of their existence, till told their own strength by the whispers of his love and the touch of his caresses.

Exquisitely happy as she was in memory and hope, she wanted him with her again to tell her it was no dream; she was restless, longing to hear his voice, counting the minutes till those dark and brilliant eyes should look once more into hers. When noon had passed, her restlessness grew into anxiety—she had unconsciously expected him quite early; with a union of child-like and lover-like impatience she had risen almost with her friends the birds, half hoping, I dare say, that he might surprise her at breakfast. Twenty times that morning had she run down to the gate, never heeding the soft summer rain that fell upon her golden hair, to look along the road for his horse and its rider. About one o'clock she stood leaning over the little wicket—a fair enough picture: a deep flush of anxiety was upon her cheeks, her blue eyes, under the shadow of her long lashes, were darkening with excitement and the thousand fluttering thoughts stirring in her heart; and with that longing to look well in his eyes which had its spring in something far nobler than coquetry, her dress was as graceful and picturesque as her simple but always tasteful toilette could afford. As she stood, the ring of hoofs rang upon the highway in the distance; the color deepened in her cheeks, her whole face

lighted up, her heart beat wildly against the wooden bar on which she rested. She was just opening the gate to run down the road to meet him, knowing how he would fling himself from the saddle at the first glimpse of her; she was lifting the latch, when the horse came nearer to her view; she saw it was not De Vigne, but *Curly*; not the one for whom her heart waited, but the one whom it rejected. With almost as much eagerness as De Vigne would have shown, he checked his horse at the little wicket before Alma could leave it, as she would fain have done. He threw himself off the saddle, and caught her hand:

“Alma! for Heaven’s sake do not turn away from me.”

She drew her hand impatiently away; she held it as De Vigne’s—it was to be touched by no other. She was disappointed, too, and for the moment forgot anything else. Poor *Curly*, he came at an unlucky hour to plead his cause!

“Alma, is your resolution fully taken?” he said, catching her little hands once more in his too tightly for her to extricate them. “Listen to me but one word: I love you so well, so dearly; it is not possible for any other to love you as I do. Can you not give me one hope? Can you not feel some pity?”

Again she drew her hands away more gently; for her first irritation had passed, and she was too sweet a nature not to feel regret for the sorrow of which she was the cause. And a look of pain passed over her glad face as she answered him very softly:

“Why ask me? What I told you two days ago was the truth. I thank you very, very much for all your kindness. I wish to Heaven you cared nothing for me, for it grieves me to pain any one, but I could never have loved you”

“You would have done if you had not met him first,”

said Brandling, his fierce jealousy of De Vigne waking up and breaking bounds.

A brighter flush rose over her brow; she lifted her head with a proud, eager gladness upon it; she misunderstood him, and fancied De Vigne had told his friend of their mutual love.

"No," she said, with her pride in Granville's love surmounting her pity for Curly's. "No; if I had never known him I should have loved his ideal, of which he alone could have been the realization. You are mistaken; I could never have loved any other!"

The speech had a strange combination of girlish fondness and impassioned tenderness; it was a speech to fall chill as ice upon the heart of her listener: he who loved her so well, and, as is so often the fate of true affection, could win not one fond word in return.

Curly's hands grasped the rail of the gate; his fair and delicate face looked aged ten years with the marks of weary pain upon it.

"He has told you, then?" he said, abruptly.

He meant of De Vigne's marriage, she thought he meant of De Vigne's love, and answered, with a deeper blush,—

"Yes!"

"My God! and you will love him?"

"While my life lasts!"

She gloried in her adoration of De Vigne, and would no sooner have thought of evading acknowledgment of it than Chelonis or Eponina of evading exile or death. How woman-like she flung aside the love that would fain have crowned her with all honor, peace, and happiness, and chose, and would equally have chosen had she known her doom, the one that would cost her such bitter tears, such burning anguish!

“Heaven help me, then—and you!”

The two last words were too low for her to hear; but, touched by the suffering on his face, she stretched out the hands she had withdrawn.

“Colonel Brandling, I am grieved myself to grieve you. Forget me; you soon will find others much more worthy of you, and until you do at least forgive me!”

“Forgive you!” repeated Curly, “what would I not! but forget you I never can. I do not hope for that. Oh, Alma, my darling!” he cried, clasping her little hands close up to his heart, “would to Heaven you would listen to me. I would make you so happy: you will never be so happy with De Vigne. He does not love you unselfishly as I do; he will sacrifice you to himself; if you would but listen to me, all that life can give shall be yours—my name, my home, higher rank than I hold now. I will win you everything you desire, and with time I will make you love me.”

At first she had listened to him in vague stupefaction, the thought never entered *her* head that any man should dare to ask her to forsake De Vigne; when she did comprehend his meaning she wrenched her hands away for the last time, her eyes flashing with anger, fiercer than any that had hitherto been roused in her young heart, passion of another sort crimsoning her brow:

“Do you dare to insult me with such words? Do you venture to suppose that any living man could ever make me faithless to him? Girl as I am, I tell you that you speak most falsely if you say that he does not love me generously, nobly, and unselfishly, with a love of which I can never be worthy. You are a true friend indeed, to come and slander him in his absence; you would not dare to try and rival him with such coward words if he were present. *He* would have scorned to take such mean advantage over *you*!”

With those vehement words, natural and right in her, but how bitter to him! Alma swept from him with a dignity of which those who only knew her in her gay and girlish moods would hardly have thought her capable, and turned in to her bay-windows, her face full of indignation at what she thought—ignorant of the fact that prompted poor Curly's unwise words—such insult and such treachery to her idolized lover. His hands grasped the gate-bar till the rusty nails that were in the wood forced themselves through his gloves into the flesh, and watched her till the last gleam of her golden hair had vanished from his sight. Then he threw himself across his saddle, and galloped down the road amid the heavy rain that now began to fall from the gathering clouds, the ring of the hoofs growing fainter on Alma's ear as she listened for those that should grow nearer and nearer till they should bring De Vigne to her side. She had no thought for Curly; I think she would have had more if she had known that never again on earth would she look upon that fair, fond face, that would so soon lie turned upward to the pitiless sky, unconscious and calm amid the roar of musketry and the glare of a captured citadel.

She threw herself down upon a couch, excited still with the glow of indignation that Curly's words had roused in her. Impetuous always, though sweet tempered, she was like a little lioness at any imputation on De Vigne; whether he had been right or wrong she would have flung herself headlong into his defense, and, had she seen any faults in her idol, she would have died before she let another breathe them. Scarcely had the gallop of Curly's horse ceased to mingle with the fall of the rain-drops and the rustle of the chestnut-leaves, when the roll of carriage-wheels broke on her ear. She started up wild with delight—this time she

felt sure it was he—and even Pauline screamed the name she had caught from Alma, “Sir Folko! Sir Folko!”

But the girl’s joyous heart fell with a dead weight upon it when she saw a hired brougham standing at her gate. She knew that if De Vigne ever drove down, which was but seldom, as he at all times preferred being in saddle, he drove in one of his own carriages with his servants. Out of the brougham came a lady, tall, stately, superbly dressed, gathering her rich skirts round with one hand as she came up the gravel path. Alma watched her with irritation and no sort of interest; she did not know her, and she supposed she was some stranger called to look at her pictures—since her *Louis Dix-sept* had been exhibited at the *Water-Colors* she had had many such visitors. The lady turned, of course, to the side of the house to approach the hall door, and Alma lay quiet on her couch, stroking Pauline’s scarlet crest, while the bird reiterated its cry, “Sir Folko! Sir Folko!”

She rose and bowed as her visitor entered, and looked at her steadily with her upraised blue eyes—with a trick Alma had of studying every new physiognomy that came before her, forming her likes and dislikes thereupon; rapidly, indeed, but nevertheless almost always unerringly. The present survey displeased her, as her guest slightly bent her stately head. They were a strange contrast, certainly. The woman tall, her figure very full, too full for beauty; her features fine and sharp, with artistic yet deep-hued rouge upon her cheeks, and Oriental tinting round her bold black eyes; her raven hair turned off à l’impératrice,—a repulsive, harsh, though undeniably handsome face, her attire splendid, her jewels glittering, yet with some indefinable want of the *lady* upon her: the girl small, slight, with native grace and aristocracy in all her movements; with the best of all loveliness, the beauty of intellect, 18-

finement, vivacity; with her light girlish dress, her general air of mingled childlikeness, intelligence, and fascination.

Alma rolled a chair toward her, seated herself again, and looked a mute inquiry as to her visitor's errand. The lady's fierce, bold eyes were fixed upon her in curious scrutiny; she seemed a woman of the world, yet she appeared at a loss how to explain her call; she played with the fringe of her parasol as she said, "Have I the pleasure of seeing Miss Tressillian?"

Alma bent her head.

She still toyed uneasily with the long fringe as she went on, never relaxing her gaze at Alma:

"May I inquire, too, whether you are acquainted with Major De Vigne?"

At the abrupt mention of the name so dear to her, the blush that yesterday De Vigne had loved to call up by his whispered words rose in Alma's face; again she bowed in silence.

"You are very intimate with him—much interested in him, are you not?"

Alma rose, her slight figure haughtily erect, her eyes sufficiently indicative of resentment at her visitor's unceremonious intrusion:

"Pardon me, madam, if *I* inquire by what title you venture to intrude such questions upon me?"

"My title is clear enough," answered her guest, with a certain sardonic smile, which did not escape Alma's quick perception, and increased her distrust of her interrogator. "Perhaps you may guess it when I ask you but one more question: Are you aware that Major De Vigne is a married man?"

For a moment the cruel abruptness of the question sent back the blood with a deadly chill to Alma's heart, and her companion's bold, harsh eyes watched with infinite amuse-

ment the quiver of anguish that passed over her bright young face at the mere thought. But it was only for a moment; the next Alma smiled at the idea, as if Sir Folko would conceal anything from her—above all, conceal *that*! Her rapid instincts made her mistrust and dislike this woman; she guessed it was some one who, having a grudge against De Vigne, had tried this clumsy method to injure him, and her clear, fearless eyes flashed contemptuous anger on her questioner; she deigned no answer to the inquiry.

“Major De Vigne is my friend. I allow no stranger to mention his name to me except with the respect it deserves. I am quite at a loss to conceive why you should trouble yourself to insult me with these unwarranted interrogations. You will excuse me if I say that I am much engaged just now, and should be glad to be left alone.”

She bowed as she spoke, and moved across the room to the bell, but her visitor would not take the hint, however unmistakable; she sat still, leaning back in her chair playing with her parasol, probably puzzled whether or no the Little Tressillian was aware of her lover's marriage. High-couraged and thoroughly game as Alma was, she felt a repugnance to this woman—a certain vague fear of her, and dislike to being alone with her—and wished, how fervently, that Granville would but come. Unconscious of who was endeavoring to pour poison into Alma's ear, he was leading his troop in sections of threes across Wormwood Scrubbs; even while he gave the word of command, his heart beating high with the memory of the fond and earnest words of love that but a few hours before he had heard, and in so few hours more should hear again.

Her visitor rose too, and took a different tone, fixing her black eyes, in whose bold stare spoke such a dark past and such an unscrupulous character, on those whose dark-blue depths shone clear with frankness, fearlessness, and youth.

“You take too high a tone, young girl, if you do not know of his marriage, you are to be pitied; if you do, you are to be blamed indeed; and if you have any shadow of right feeling left in you, you will be bowed down with shame before me, and will never, out of both regard for yourself and justice to me, see Granville De Vigne again, when I tell you that *I* am his wife!”

“His wife!” With ashy lips poor little Alma re-echoed the words, which came to her with but a vague significance, yet with a chill of horror. His wife!—that coarse, cruel-eyed woman, with her bold stare, and her gorgeous dress, which yet could not give her the stamp of birth; for Time had not passed wholly lightly on the Trefusis, and now that the carnation in her cheeks had ceased to be from nature, and her form, always Juno-like, had now grown far too full for symmetry, handsome as she still was, there was more trace of the Frestonhill’s milliner in her than of the varnish she had adopted from the Parisiennes, and at thirty-seven the Trefusis had grown—vulgar! That woman his wife! Chill and horrible as the words had once sounded in her ear, Alma, true to her glowing faith in, and reverence of, De Vigne, could have laughed at the mere thought. That woman his wife!—his! when but a few hours before he had called her his love, his darling, his own little Alma, and kissed her, when she spoke to him of their sweet future together! She knew it was a plot against him; she would not join in it by lending ear to it. Even had it been true, no lips but his should have told her; but it was not true—it could not be. *He* could never have loved that woman—splendid though she might have been in her early youth—with her rouged cheeks, her tinted eyelids, her cruel eyes, her cold, harsh voice, her style, which struck on the Little Tressillian’s senses as

something so wholly unlike the refinement, the intellect, the delicacy which seemed to please him now. Alma did not remember that a man's first love is invariably the antipodes of his last!

"You his wife!" she repeated, with a contempt in the curl of her lips which excited the savage nature of her listener, as the Trefusis's words and tone had excited the slumbering fire of Alma's character. "You *his* wife? Before pretending to such a title, you should first have learnt the semblance of a lady to uphold you in the assumption of your rôle. Your impertinence in addressing me I shall not honor by resenting; but your ill-done plot, I must tell you, will scarcely pass current with me."

She spoke haughtily and impatiently, anger and disdain flashing from her expressive face, which never cared to attempt concealment of any thought passing through her mind.

"Plot!" repeated the Trefusis, with a snarl on her lips like a hound catching hold of its prey, her savage temper working up, not warmly, as De Vigne's and Alma's passion did when roused, but coldly and cruelly. "You think it a plot, young lady? or do you only say so to brazen it out before a woman you have foully wronged? If it be a plot, what say you then to that?"

Not letting go her hold upon it, she held before Alma's eyes the certificate of her marriage.

"Read it!"

Alma, who had never seen a document of the kind, saw only a printed paper, and put it aside with a haughty gesture; she would have none of this woman's enforced confidences. But the Trefusis caught her little delicate wrist in the hard grasp of the large hand that years before Sabretasche had noticed, and held the certificate so that Alma could not choose but see the two names, Granville

De Vigne and Constance Lucy Trefusis, with the prolix preamble with which his Grace of Canterbury so graciously permits an Englishman to wed.

Alma's face grew white, even to her lips; her eyes black, as they were sure to do under strong excitement; for an instant her heart stopped with a dull throb of anguish and horror, then, true to her allegiance, refused, even in the face of proof, the doubt that would dishonor him; no thought that was treachery to her lover should dwell in her mind, no stranger should whisper of him in his absence to her! She threw off the Trefusis's hand as though it had been the gripe of an adder's fangs.

"Leave my presence this instant," she said, fiercely, her soft eyes flashing like dark-blue steel in the sunlight; "it is useless to seek to injure him with me."

As she spoke she rang the bell, and so loudly that the single servant of the house responded to the summons instantly; Alma bowed her head with the stately grace of an empress signing to her household, "Show this lady to the door."

For once in her life the Trefusis was baffled; she knew not how to play her next card, uncertain as to whether or no Alma was aware of her marriage to De Vigne, judging, of the two, that she was—for of a love as true, a faith as honorable as the Little Tressillian's, she never could even have imagined. She had hoped to find a weak and timorous young girl, whom her dignity would awe and her story overwhelm, but she was baffled, cheated of her second revenge upon De Vigne. She turned once more to Alma, with her devil's sneer upon her fine bold features:

"Excuse me, Miss Tressillian, for my very misplaced pity for you. I fancied you a young and orphaned girl, whom knowledge of the truth might warn from an evil course; I regret to find one on whom all warnings are thrown away,

and who gives insult where she should ask for pardon. No other motive than pity for you prompted my call. I have been too often the victim of Major De Vigne's inconstancy for it to have any longer power to wound me."

Then the woman, whom Church and Law would have termed his wife, swept from the room, and the girl, whom Love and Nature would have declared his wife, was left once more to her solitude. In that solitude poor little Alma's high-strung nerves gave way; while her sword and her shield were wanted she had done battle for him gallantly, but now they were no longer needed her courage forsook her, and she lay on the couch sobbing bitterly. Tears had always been very rare with her, but of late they had found their way much oftener to the eyes which should have been as shadowless as the deep Southern skies, whose hue they took; with passion, all other floodgates of the heart are loosed. Her wild ecstasy of rapture was certain to have its reaction; vehement joys, too, often pay their own price—above all, with natures that feel both too keenly! She did not credit what the Trefusis had told her; her own quick perception, true in its deduction, though here not true in fact, knew that no really injured wife would have taken the tone of her visitor, nor so undignified a means of making her wrongs and her title known; there was something false, coarse, cruel in the Trefusis, which struck at once on her delicate senses; she felt sure it was a plot against him, the marriage certificate a forgery; she had read of women who had taken similar revenge upon men. "So many must have loved him," thought poor little Alma, "and so many, therefore, will hate me as I should hate any one who took him away from me." So she reasoned, with that loyal love which, truer than the love that is fabled as *blind*, if it see a stain on its idol will veil it from all eyes, even from its own

She did not, for an instant, believe what the Trefusis had told her; she was sure her Sir Folko would never have concealed it from her—he would never have deceived her. Still it had left upon her a sort of vague dull weight; she felt afraid, she scarcely knew of what, a terror lest her new-won joys should leave her as suddenly as they had come to her; she longed for her lover to be with her once more, to feel him take her in his arms again, and hear him tell her he was all her own; her thirst for De Vigne's presence became almost unbearable: she would have given years of her young life to look in his eyes again, and hear his voice whisper, as it had done the night before, those love-vows which had awoke all the slumbering passions of her nature.

Once more the roll of carriage-wheels interrupted the ceaseless fall of the heavy rain. Alma started up; dashing the tears from her flushed cheeks, joy beaming again on her changing face, every sense strained to see if at last it was he. But that she would not welcome him with tears she could have wept with delight when she saw on the carriage-box a man whom she knew to be his servant, his own valet Raymond, whom she remembered so well because he had brought her Pauline, and the flowers that had made De Vigne's first gift; *now* she knew his master must be there!

Poor little Alma! She had suffered a good deal in her brief life, but she had never known anything like the terror which, crowding the pain of hours into a single minute, laid its leaden hand upon her when she saw not De Vigne, but his servant alone approach.

"Oh my God! what has happened? He is ill!" she uttered, unconsciously, her nerves unstrung by her interview with the Trefusis; her imagination seized on all the evils that could have befallen one whom she loved so well,

thoughts, seemed to hover round her; she had had from infancy a strange, vague terror of being alone in darkness, and she stretched out her hands with a pitiful cry:

“Sir Folko—Granville—oh! where are you?”

In answer to her call a man's form drew near, indistinct in the less than *demi-lumière*, and in her ear a man's voice whispered:

“My love, my beautiful, my idolized Alma, there is one here who loves you dearer than him you call. If I have erred in bringing you here, pardon at least a fault of too much love.”

A shriek of loathing, despair, horror, and anguish burst from Alma's lips, ringing shrill and loud through the darkened room, as she knew the speaker to be Vane Castleton. She struggled from his grasp so fiercely that he was forced to let her go, and mastering her terror with the courage that was planted side by side in her nature with so much that was poetic and susceptible, she turned on to him coldly and haughtily, as she had spoken to the Trefusis:

“Lord Vane, what do you think to gain by daring to insult me thus? Major De Vigne's servant brought me here to see his master, who was dangerously hurt. I desire you to leave me, or, if this be your house, and you have one trace of a gentleman's honor left in you, to tell me at once where I may find my friend.”

Castleton would have laughed outright at the little fool's simplicity, but he was willing to win her by gentle means if he could, perhaps, for there are few men entirely blunted and inured to shame; he scarcely relished the fiery scorn of those large blue eyes that flashed upon him in the twilight.

“Do not be so severe upon me,” he said, softly. “Surely one so gentle to all others may pardon an offense born

from a passion of which she of all others should show some pity. I would have told you yesterday how madly I love you—and my love is no cold English fancy, Alma—I love you, my beautiful, idolized, divine little angel; and my love has driven me perhaps to error, but an error such as women should surely pardon.”

“Do not touch me!” cried Alma, fiercely, as he stretched out his arm again toward the delicate form that he could crush in his grasp as a tiger’s fangs a young gazelle. “Your words are odious to me, your love pollution, your presence hateful. Insult me no more, but answer me, yes or no, where is Major De Vigne?”

“De Vigne? I do not know. He is with his wife; he cannot hear you, and would not help you if he did.”

“It is a lie!” moaned Alma, almost delirious with fear and passion. “He has no wife; and if he cannot help me now he will revenge me before long for all your dastard insults.”

“How will he hear of them, pretty one?” laughed Castleton. “Do you think, now I have you, I shall let you go again? I have hardly caged my bird only to let her fly. We shall clip your wings, loveliest, till you like your captivity too well to try and free yourself. You are mine now, Alma; you shall never be De Vigne’s.”

“I shall never be yours—dastard!—coward!” gasped Alma, striking him with her clinched fingers. Involuntarily he loosened his hold one moment; that moment was enough for her; she wrenched herself from him, flew across the room, tore aside the curtain of one of the windows;—by good fortune it was open, and, without heeding what height she might fall, leaped from its low sill on to the ground without. The window was five feet off the ground—lawn below, but, happily for her, there lay just where she alighted a large heap of cut grass—all that had been

mown off the turf that morning having been gathered together just beneath the window. Its yielding softness broke her fall, but she lay stunned for a moment, till Castleton's voice from the chamber made her spring to her feet, like a hare that has lain down panting to rest a moment in its run for life, and starts off again, with every nerve quivering and every sense stretched, at the bay of the hounds in pursuit. She sprung to her feet, and ran with all the fleetness to which her terror of Castleton's chase could urge her feet, along the lawn. The grounds were a labyrinth to her, the light was dim and dusky, the rain still fell in torrents, but Alma's single thought was to get away from that horrible house to which she had been lured for such a horrible fate. She fled across the lawn, and through a grove of young firs, taking the first path that presented itself; the road through the plantation led her on about a quarter of a mile; she flew over the dank wet turf with the speed of a hunted antelope, yet to her, with the dread of pursuit upon her, thinking every moment she heard steps behind her, feeling every instant in imagination the grasp of her hated lover and foe, it seemed as though leaden weights were on her ankles, and each step she took seemed to take her a hundred steps backward. At the end of the plantation was a staken-bound fence, and a high gate, with spikes on its top rail. Her heart grew sick with terror: if she turned back she would fall into Castleton's grasp as surely as a fox that doubles from a wall falls a victim to the pack. She knew he would pursue her; to retrace her steps would be to meet him, and Alma knew him well enough to guess what mercy she would find at his hands. An old man, gathering up his tools after thinning the trees and loosening the earth round their roots, was near the gate, and to him Alma rushed:

"Let me through! let me through, for God's sake!" she

gasped, her fingers clinching on his arm, the wild terror on her face telling her story without words.

The old peasant, a hard-featured, kindly-eyed old man, looked at her in amazement.

“Poor bonny child, where would you go?”

“Let me through quick—quick, for the love of Heaven!” whispered Alma, panting with her breathless race.

Without another question the woodsman unlocked the gate and let her pass; she flew through it with a murmured “God reward you!” and as he locked the padlock after her, and took up his axe and spade, he muttered to his own thoughts, “Castleton would flay me alive if he could for that; but I don’t care—she’s too bonnie a birdie for such an evil cage.”

Once through the gate, she found herself where two cross-roads met; ignorant which led back to London, she took the one on her right and ran on, every step she took plunging her into the heavy and sloppy mud left by the continuous rain in the afternoon, the thick drops of the shower, that still fell fast and heavily, falling on her golden hair and soaking through her muslin dress, for both her hat and cloak had fallen off in the struggle with Castleton; her heart beating to suffocation, her delicate limbs, so unused to all fatigue or exertion, already beginning to fail her, every nerve on the rack in the dread horror of pursuit, strained to tension to catch the sound she dreaded so intensely, that not a bough cracked in the wind or a rain-drop splashed in the puddles as she passed but she thought it was Castleton or his emissaries chasing her to carry her back to that horrible house. On and on she ran, her gold hair loosened and streaming behind her, heavy and dank with water, her thin boots soaked and clogged with the weight of the mud gathered fresh with every step, her strength failing her, and every sinew throbbing, cracking,

aching with that merciless race from what was worse than death. At last she could run no longer; with all her terror to push her on, and all her spirit, which was ever much greater than her strength, Nature would do no more, and rebelled against the unnatural strain upon her powers. She could not run, but she walked on and on, at first rapidly, halting every now and then for breath, then toiling wearily, ready to sink down on the wet, cold earth, murmuring every now and then De Vigne's name, or whispering a prayer to God. On she still went, she knew not where, only away, away, away forever from Vane Castleton. Poor little Alma, so tenderly nurtured, so delicately bred, sensitive as a hot-house flower, the child of art, of love, of refinement, with her high-wrought imagination, her delicate mould of form and thought, her child-like fear of solitude in darkness! She must have suffered in that cruel flight more than we, with men's strength and power of endurance and of self-defense, can ever guess. On and on she dragged her weary way, till the dusky haze of rain and fog deepened to the softer gray of night, and the storm ceased and the crescent moon came out over the grand old trees of Windsor Forest. She had toiled on till she had reached the outskirts of the royal park, and as the moonlight shivered on their gaunt boughs and played on their wet leaves, and the dark hollows of their massive trunks stood out in cavernous gloom, and the summer winds sighed and moaned through the dim forest glades, Alma stopped, powerless to stir again, and a deadly terror of something vague and unknown crept upon her, for, strong as her clear reason was with the daylight of intellect and science, her brain was strongly creative, her nerves exquisitely tender, her mind steeped in poetry, romance, and out-of-the-world lore even from her childhood, when she had believed in fairies because Shakspeare and Milton

wrote of them. A deadly terror came upon her; a hundred wild stories that she would have laughed at at another hour rose in chaos before her mind, bewildered already with the horrors of the past day. She was afraid to be alone with that vast silent forest, those cold, solemn stars; she was afraid of the night, of the stillness, of the solitude; she who but so few hours before had been gathered to De Vigne's heart and sheltered in his arms, there, as she had thought, to find asylum all her life. She was afraid; a cold trembling seized her, she looked wildly up at those great sighing trees waving their gaunt arms and silver foliage in the moonlight; no sound in the hushed evening air but the hooting of an owl or the clash of the horns of fighting stags. One sob rose in her throat, De Vigne's name rang through the quiet woodlands and up to the dark skies, then she fell forward almost insensible on the tangled moss, wet and cold with the rain of the past day, her long bright hair trailing on the grass, her fair white brow lying on the damp and dirty earth, her little hands clinched on the gnarled roots of a beech-tree that had stood in its place for centuries past, while race after race of immortals, with thought and brain, passion and suffering, had passed away unheeded to their graves. There she lay; and as if in pity for this fair, fragile, human thing, the summer winds sighed softly over her, and touched her brow with soft caresses as they played among her wet and golden curls. She had no power to move, to stir even a limb; terror, fatigue, that horrible and breathless race, that terrible run through the pitiless storm, had almost beaten all the young life out of her. Nature could do no more; the spirit could no longer bear up against the suffering of the body; where she had fallen she lay, broken and worn out; if Castleton had been upon her she could not have risen or dragged herself one other step. She was but half

conscious ; wild thoughts, vague horrors, shapes, and sights and sounds, indistinct with the unembodied terrors of night-dreams, danced at times before her closed eyes, and hovered on the borders of her brain ; still she lay there, powerless to move from the phantasms of her mind, equally powerless to repel them with her will. All volition was gone ; terror and bodily fatigue had done their work, till the mind itself at last succumbed, outwearied, and a heavy, dreamless sleep stole on her, the sleep of nature utterly worn out. There she lay on the cold, dank moss, the dark brushwood waving over her, above her the silent vault of heaven, with its mysterious worlds revolving in their spheres, while the great boughs of the forest stirred with a mournful rhythm, and through their silent glades moved with melancholy sigh and measure, the spirit of the summer wind.

PART THE TWENTY-FIRST.

I.

HOW LITTLE ALMA HOVERED BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.

THE summer morning dawned sweetly on the grand old trees that were shaking the dew off their glossy leaves, and lifting their boughs to the sunshine ; the herds of deer rose from their fern couches, and trooped down to the pools for their morning drink ; the subtle, delicious fragrance of the dawn rose up from the wet grass that sparkled in the light after the storm of the past day, and from the deep dells, and shadowy glades, and sunny knolls of the Royal Forest rose a soft morning hymn of joy. One of the rangers was going home to his cottage for

breakfast, a white-haired old man, who had lived in the stately woodlands till he loved them almost as men love their own ancestral homes, and knew every legend that had haunted those royal glades since the days when Edward of York led his brilliant hunting-train in the midsummer sheen, and the eighth Tudor listened for the cannon boom that told him his own fair wife and Thomas Wynn's false love was murdered. He was going to his home for breakfast, when he caught sight of something gleaming white among the brushwood on the outskirts of the forest, and drawing nearer, to his astonishment beheld Alma as she slept. He was going to awaken her somewhat roughly, perhaps, but something in her attitude touched him, and as he stooped over her and marked the fine texture of the dress, soaked through with mud and rain, her delicate hands with their white skin and blue veins, her face, so pale, so youthful, so refined, with the circles under the eyes dark as the lashes resting on them, and the parted lips, through which every breath came with such feverish and painful effort, he shrank involuntarily from touching harshly what seemed so fragile and so helpless.

He stooped over her, perplexed and worried; he did not like to leave her; he did not like to move her.

"Poor pretty child!" he muttered, drawing her thick golden hair through his rough fingers, and feeling her hand, which burnt like fire. "Who's sent her out to such a bed, I wonder? If she's been lying out all night, she's caught her death of cold. I should like to take her home, poor young thing; but what would the old woman say?"

The worthy man, being a trifle henpecked, paused at this view of the question; his charity halting before the dread of another's condemnation of it, as charity in the

great world shrinks and hides her head before the dread of the "que dira-t-on !" He wavered ; he could not leave her there ; he was afraid, poor fellow, to take her home, lest a hissing voice should condemn his folly, and a shrew's vituperations reward him for his Samaritanism. He wavered still, while his dog, with the true instinct and ready kindness with which dumb animals so often shame their owners, began to lick those little burning hands with his great rough tongue, in honest well-meaning to do good and to offer what help lay in his power.

As his master wavered, ashamed to leave, afraid to take her with him, a lady and two little girls, a governess and her pupils, walking before their breakfast, drew near, too. The keeper knew them, and looked up as they approached, for they were astonished as well as he at this girlish figure with the white dress and golden hair lying down on the dark dank moss.

"Dear me, Reuben—dear me, what is this ?" asked the governess, while the children's eyes grew round and bright with wonder and pleasure at seeing something strange to tell when they reached home.

"It's a woman, ma'am," responded the keeper, literally, while the lady drew near a little cautiously and a little frightened ; for, though a good-hearted, gentle creature, she *was* a woman, and by no means exempt from the peculiar theories of her sex, and no lady, we know, will look at another, however in distress or want, unless she knows she is "proper" for her own pure eyes to rest upon.

"It's a woman," went on Reuben, "or rather a girl, ma'am, for she's only a bit of a thing. She looks like a lady, too, ma'am—leastways her face and her hands do—and her dress is like them bits of cobwebs that fine ladies wear, that are no good at all for wind and weather. If she's been lying here all night, sure she'll die of cold afore

long, though it is summer, to be sure; but by the look on her, I fear she's been out in all the rain last evening. She's only asleep now, ma'am, though she do look like a corpse, and I don't know what to do with her, ma'am, for you see it ain't a little thing for poor people like us to get an invalid into our house for, maybe, two or three months, and a long doctor's bill, and perhaps in the end nothing to pay it with; and as for the work-house——"

"Couldn't we take her home with us? I am sure mamma would let us. Don't you think we might, Miss Russell?" asked the younger girl, a bright-faced child of ten or eleven.

"Hush, Cecy! Don't be silly! How could we take a person home that we know nothing about? She can't be a very *nice* person you are sure, Cecy, or she wouldn't be out here all alone," said her elder sister, reprovingly, who had already learnt her little lesson in the world's back-reading of charity, and had already a special little jury of her own for haranguing and converting people according to the practices she saw around her.

"Let me look at her, poor young creature. You were quite right, Cecy dear, to be kind to people, though you could never do such a thing without asking your mamma; and you should not be so quick to condemn others, Arabella; it is not doing as you would be done by, my love. Let me look at this poor young thing!" said the governess, her compassion getting the better of her prudence. She stooped over the figure that lay so motionless amid all their speculations upon her, turned her face gently toward the light, and, as the sun-rays fell upon it, cried out in bitter horror, "Alma! my poor little Alma! How can she have come here?" And, to the children's wonder, their governess sank on her knees by the girl, pushing

the damp hair off her forehead, kissing her pale cheek, and almost weeping over her in her astonishment and her sorrow.

“Do you know her, ma’am?” asked the keeper. “Do you know her, Miss Russell?” cried the children, in shrill chorus of surprise and curiosity. The poor lady could not answer them at first; she was speechless with bewilderment to find her darling Alma lying here sleeping, with the damp earth for her pillow, out here under the morning skies, with nothing to shelter her from night dew or noontide sun, as lonely, as wretched, as homeless as the most abject outcast flying from his life and banned from every human habitation.

“Yes, Reuben—yes, my dears—I know her well, indeed, poor darling!” she answered them at last, hurriedly and incoherently, and trembling with the sudden shock and her uncertainty how in the world to act. “She is Alma Tressillian—my dear little Alma. Heaven only knows now she can have come here! What can have happened to her—what can have driven her all this distance from her home?”

“Is this Miss Tressillian you used to tell us about?” asked Cecy, eagerly.

“I thought all your pupils had been *ladies*, Miss Russell?” asked Arabella, standing aloof, with a curl on her lip.

But Miss Russell for once heard nothing either of them said; she was trying to wake Alma from the slumber that, save for her labored breathings, seemed the very counterfeit of death. Whether she woke or not she could not tell; a heavy, struggling sigh heaved her chest; she tried to turn, but had no power; then her eyes unclosed, but there was no consciousness in them; the lids dropped again immediately; a shiver as of icy cold ran through her; she lay still, motionless as the dead.

"What can we do with her?" cried poor Miss Russell, half beside herself with grief for the girl, and powerlessness to aid her, for in her own home she was but a dependent, and her employer, a rector, in the constant habit of dinning charity and its duties into the ears of his "flock," would, she knew, resent even more than Reuben's wife the introduction into his house of a person ill and in need who could not repay him with *éclat* for his Christianity. "What shall we do?" cried the poor lady. "She will die, poor dear child, if she is half an hour longer without medical aid. Poor little darling, what can ever have brought her to this——"

"I'll take her to our house," said Reuben, decided at last. "Since you know her, ma'am, that'll be everything to my missis."

"Do, do," assented the governess, eagerly; she would have done anything for her darling Alma that anybody could have suggested, no matter how much to her own hinderance, but by nature she was nervous, timid, and undecided. "Do, Reuben, take her at once, and pray move her tenderly. I must see the Miss Seymours home, but I shall be at your cottage as soon as you are. Take her up gently. My poor little darling!"

Reuben lifted the girl in his arms, those sturdy, rough arms, so little used to such a load, and laid the golden head with no harsh touch against his shoulder. They might have taken her where they would, Alma knew nothing of it. Miss Russell looked at her lingeringly a moment; she longed so much to go with her, but she dared not take her pupils to see a girl whom their reverend father "did not know." She retraced her steps rapidly with Arabella and Cecy, and Reuben went onward with his burden.

The governess was as good as her promise. Reuben's

wife, with no over good grace, had but just received her new charge, with much amazement and loud grumbling, till softened, despite herself, by that sad, unconscious face, when Miss Russell came, bringing her own linen for her best-loved pupil's use, and helped her to lay Alma on the couch, which was, if small and hard, scrupulously clean, bathe her burning temples with vinegar, bind up her long, damp hair, and then wait—wait, unable to do more, till medical aid should arrive.

For six weeks Alma lay on that bed, unable to move hand or foot, unconscious to everything surrounding her, life only kept in her by the untiring efforts and master's skill of a brain that put out all its powers to save her, and fought her battle with Death in her defense, unwearied in her cause, though he knew she was young and friendless, and that no payment, save the human life saved, might reward him; while the priest only sighed out his fears that she was not "prepared," and excused himself from all office of his much-boasted Christain charity "on the score of his carrying the infection to his children"—the *infection* of brain fever! If De Vigne had watched over her through those long weeks when her life hung but on a thread, I think it would have driven him mad; it struck to the hearts of all who saw her, to watch her as she lay there, her wide, fair brow knit with pain, her beautiful blue eyes wide open, without sense or thought, only a dull burning glare in her aching eyeballs, her cheeks flushed deeply and dangerously, her long golden hair wet with the ice laid on her temples—her mind gone, not in raving or chattering delirium, but into a strange, dull, voiceless unconsciousness, in which the only tie that linked her to life and reason was that one name which now and then she murmured faint and low, "Sir Folko! Granville!"

The night out in the forest brought on inflammation of

the lungs; the shock, the horror, the agitation of her mind, fever; and against the two only her own young life and the skill that grappled for her with the death that hovered round her couch alone enabled her to battle. At last youth and science conquered; at last the bent brow grew calm, the crimson flush paled upon her face, her long, black lashes drooped wearily upon her cheek, her breathing grew more even, her voice ceased to murmur that piteous wail, "Sir Folko! Granville!" and she slept.

"She will live now," said her doctor, watching that calm and all-healing sleep.

"Thank God!" murmured her old governess, with tears of joy.

"Who is that man whose name she mutters so constantly?" asked Montessor, the medical man, outside her door, while Alma slept on as she had slept for fifteen hours, and did sleep on for another five.

Miss Russell was somewhat embarrassed to reply; her calm and prudent nature had puzzled in vain over Alma's strange, expansive attachment, half childish in its frankness, but so wildly passionate in its strength.

"Really I can hardly tell. I fancy—I believe—she means a gentleman, a friend of Mr. Tressillian's, of whom I know she was very fond."

Montessor smiled.

"Can we find him? He should be within call; for if she has wanted him so much in unconsciousness, she had better not be excited by asking for him in vain when she awakes. What is he?"

"An officer in the army—in the Cavalry, I believe," answered the governess, much more inclined to keep De Vigne away than to bring him there.

"A soldier? Oh, we can soon learn his whereabouts, then. What is his name, do you know?"

“Major De Vigne,” said Miss Russell, reluctantly, for if there was anybody that mild and temperate woman disliked on earth, it was the person whom she termed that “fascinating and very dangerous man,” at whose feet she had once found Alma sitting so fondly. Montessor put the name in his note-book. Two days after he called on Miss Russell.

“I wrote to the Horse Guards for Major De Vigne’s address. They tell me he is gone to the Crimea. Tiresome fellow! he would have been my best tonic.”

The doctor might well say so, for when at length she awoke from the lengthened sleep that had given her back to life, enfeebled as she was—so much so that for many days she lay as motionless, though not as unconscious as before—taking passively all the nourishment they brought her, the first words she spoke in her broken voice, which scarcely stirred the air, were:

“Where is he? Can’t you bring him here? Pray do; he will come if you tell him I am ill. He will come to his poor little Alma. Go and find him. Pray go!”

And little as Miss Russell could sympathize or comprehend this to her strange and somewhat reprehensible attachment for a man who, as she thought, had never said a word of affection in return; who certainly had never offered to make Alma his wife—the only act on a man’s part that could possibly justify a woman in liking him, according to that prudent and tranquil lady’s theory—she was too really fond of Alma not to grieve sorely to have no answer with which to relieve that ceaseless and plaintive question, “Why does he not come? Why don’t you send for him?” till Miss Russell, far from quick at a subterfuge, and loathing a falsehood, was obliged to have recourse to an evasion, after much difficulty in searching her mind for an excuse.

“My dear child, if you excite yourself you will bring on your illness again, and you may never see your friend again. You must not see Major De Vigne yet, for your own sake; besides, remember, your fever is infectious; you would not bring him into danger, surely? When all is safe for you and him we will try how we can bring him here.”

Alma gave a deep, heavy sigh; all the returning light died out of her eyes.

“Ah, I shall never get well without him; but I cannot think how I came here, I cannot remember. Let him know how I am; pray do, but tell him I love him better than myself, and I will not see him if there is danger for him; only, only, I wonder he did not come to me,—I would have gone to him!”

And poor little Alma, too weak to rebel, too exhausted still for her memory to recall anything of the past, except what she had remembered even in delirium, De Vigne and her love for him, burst into tears, and lay with her face to the wall, weeping low, heart-broken sobs that went to the heart of those that heard them.

“She will never get well like this,” said Montessor, in despair at seeing his victory of science over death being undone again as fast as it could. “Who is this Major De Vigne? Deuce take the man, why did he go away just when one wanted him the most? Was Miss Tressillian engaged to him?”

“Not that I ever heard,” replied Miss Russell, sorely troubled with the subject. “But, you see, Mr. Montessor, she has very strong affections, and she has led a strange, solitary life, and Major De Vigne was her grandpapa’s friend, and has been very kind to her since she came to England, but—you know—it would hardly be correct, if he *were* in England, for him to come here——”

"Correct!" repeated Montessor, with a smile that the man of the world could not for the life of him repress at the good governess's prudery, "we medical men, my dear lady, have no time to stop for conventionalities when life is in the balance; when we have to deal so much with realities, we learn to put that sort of scruple at its right value. If Major De Vigne were anywhere in this country I would make him come and quiet my patient by a sight of him, as none of my opiates will do her without. She will never get well like this; her body is stronger, but she has sunk into a most dangerous lethargy; all she does is to sob quietly, and murmur that man's name to herself, and if we cannot get at the mind we cannot work miracles with the body; that confounded brain and nervous system working together are our worst enemies to deal with, for there are no medicines that will reach them. She will never get well like this; we must rouse her in some way; any shock would be better than this dreamy lethargy; there is no knowing to what mischief it may not lead. I shall tell her he is gone to the Crimea."

"Oh, Mr. Montessor! pray don't!" cried the governess, tender-hearted even to what she considered as so reprehensible an attachment. "Pray don't; I assure you it will kill her!"

"She is much more likely to be killed if left as she is now," answered Montessor. "I shall tell her he is gone to the Crimea, and that she must get well to go after him."

Miss Russell's face of horror at the suggestion made him laugh, in spite of courtesy. "I shall," repeated the doctor; "anything that will rouse her I shall say; if my patients have a fancy to go to the moon I humor them, if humoring the fancy any way tends to their recovery."

"Who do you wish so much to see?" asked Montessor,

gently, when he visited Alma on the morrow and found her lying in the same despondent attitude, no color in her pale cheeks, no light in her sunk eyes.

Alma's mind was not yet wholly awake, but dim memories of what had passed, and what had brought her there, only hovered through her brain, entangled even yet inextricably with the phantasma of delirium. All she was fully awake to, and vividly conscious of, was the longing for De Vigne: so strong was that upon her that she started up in her bed when Montessor asked the question, her eyes getting back some of their old luminous light, and the first faint rose tint of color on her face.

"Sir Folko—Granville—Major De Vigne, my only friend! I am sure they have not told him I am ill, or he would have come. If I could see my old nurse she would tell him—where is she, too? it is so strange—so very strange. Will *you* tell him? do, pray do, I shall never get well till I can see him!" And Alma sank back upon her pillows with a heavy, weary sigh.

Montessor put his hand upon her pulse and kept it there. He saw that her mind was very nearly unhinging again, and since it was out of his power to get De Vigne here, he was obliged to try some other way to rouse her.

"Do you love this friend of yours so much, then?" he asked her, gently still.

Alma looked at him a moment; then her eyes drooped, the faint blush wavered in her cheek, her mind was dawning, and with it dawned the recognition of Montessor as a stranger, and that reluctance to speak of De Vigne to others which was so blended with her demonstrative frankness to him. She answered him more calmly, though with a simplicity and fervor which touched Montessor more than anything else could have done, for the unmasked human nature which his profession had often shown him had made

him naturally and justly skeptical of many of the displays of feelings that he saw.

"Yes," said Alma, lifting her eyes to his face. "Yes, he is all I have on earth! and he will come to me—he will, indeed—if you will only let him know. I cannot think why he is not here. I wish I could remember——"

She pressed her hands to her forehead—the history of the two days began to come to her, but still slowly and confusedly.

"Keep quiet, and you will remember everything in time," said Montessor.

Alma shook her head with a faint sign of dissent. "Not if you keep him away from me—it is a plot, I know it is a plot. Why am I to lie here and never see him? It is cruel. I cannot think why you all try to keep him away——"

She was getting excited again; two feverish spots burned in her cheeks, and her eyes glowed dark and angry.

"No one is trying to keep him away," said Montessor, gravely and slowly. "If it rested with us you should see him this instant—who should plot against you, poor child? But your friend is a soldier, and soldiers cannot always be where they would. There is a war, you know, between England and Russia, and Major de Vigne has been sent off with his troop to the Crimea."

He spoke purposely in few and simple words, not to confuse her with lengthened sentences or verbose preparation. As he thought, it took electrical effect. Alma sprang up in her bed, and seized his wrist in both her hands.

"Gone—gone—away from *me*! Do you mean it? Is it true?"

Montessor looked at her kindly and steadily:

"Quite true; it was his duty as a soldier. You must try and get well to welcome him back."

"Gone!—gone! Oh, my God! And to war! Gone! and he never came for one farewell; he never came to see his poor little Alma once again. Gone to the Crimea, and I may never see him, never hear his voice, never look at his face again! He may be ill, and I shall not be there; he may die, and I shall not know it; he may lie in his grave, and I shall not be with him! Gone!—gone! it is *not* true—it cannot be true; he would never go without one word to his little Alma. If it *be* true, let me go to him—I am quite well, quite able; God will give me strength, and I love him too much for death to have any power over me till I have seen him once again."

In her wild, excited agony she would have sprung from her couch, had not Montessor held her down in his firm grasp, and spoken to her in a calm and resolute tone which gave him wonderful sway over his patients.

"Lie still, and listen to me. It is true Major de Vigne is gone to the Crimea; probably he was ordered off, as officers often are, on a moment's notice. He may have sent to you, he may have gone to take leave of you, but that would have been at your home, he could not tell that you were here. If you wish to see him again—if you wish, as you say, to follow him to the Crimea—you must calm yourself, and do your best to recover. This excitement is the worst possible thing for your health, and unless you try to tranquilize your mind you will never be well either to find your friend or to make any inquiries about him. If you do care for him, you must do what I am sure he would wish you—your utmost to be quiet and get well again."

She listened to him with more comprehension in her large, sad eyes than had been in them since Montessor

first saw her. "Thank you, thank you; you are very kind!" But then her head drooped on her hands, a passion of tears convulsed her frame, she sobbed with all the vehemence and abandon of her nature. "Gone!—gone! Oh, life of my life, why did you leave me?"

But Montessor did not mind those tears—there were vitality, passion, reality, and strength in them; they were wholly unlike those pitiful, broken, half-unconscious wailings, and would, he knew, relieve her surcharged brain. He left her to go his rounds, and when she was alone after her first passionate hours of grief, with this shock all the past, link on link, came slowly and bewilderingly to Alma's mind. For the first time since she had been placed, seven weeks before, on that bed in the ranger's cottage, did she remember that horrible race in the midsummer storm, the terrors of that night in Windsor Forest, which had ended in bringing her thither. The Trefusis's visit, Raymond's trap, Castleton's loathed love, the scene in that hateful house, came back upon her memory, and De Vigne had doubtless heard of that flight with Castleton, and, accrediting evil of her, had given her up and gone to the Crimea. She could have shrieked aloud in her agony to have lost him thus—to have him, without whom existence was valueless, gone into danger and death through her; to know that he, from whom her affection had never wandered since the time when, a little child, she had told him "*Alma vi ama*" in the library at old Weive Hurst, and from whom it never would wander, though she were never to see his face again, that he should be left to think she could forsake him, and gone where she could not fly to him to say, "I am yours alone, in life and death!" Surely he must have known that, with such words as they had spoken—with such a parting as theirs had been—she could not have fled with another?—he could not believe that all the love she

had shown him was a lie?—he could not let her go on such cruel evidence? *She* would not have believed against *him*; she had not credited the Trefusis's story; she had felt that it was a link in Castleton's plot—the woman but an emissary of his. De Vigne should have had the same faith in her; Sir Folko should never have left her, his own poor little Alma!

As she thought and thought, Alma grew almost maddened; to lose him just when their hearts were knit in one, just when the heaven of love was dawning before their eyes; to lose him to danger and to death!—she thought her brain would go; with the wild despair, the desperate, fierce longing to see him, be with him, hear his voice in her ear, feel his arms round her, telling her she was his own, and that none could make him doubt her. There was but one thing kept her up, one thought that forced her to calm herself, that one on which Montessor had relied: that to write to him—still more, to go to him, to learn anything of him, to dispel in any way this hideous barrier that had risen up between, as a horrible nightmare fills up the space between the golden evening and the laughing morn—she must get well. In Alma, with all her impetuosity and passion, childlike gayety and reckless impulsiveness, there was much strong volition, much earnest and concentrated fixity of will and purpose; she had not a grain of patience, but she had a great deal of perseverance, insomuch as she grew sick to death of waiting for a thing, but would work on for it with a strength and resolute vehemence that generally brought her her object in the end. If she was wanting to make an out-of-door sketch, and the sky was unpropitious, she was feverish with impatience till it cleared, and would not wait a moment for better weather; but if the sketch depended on her own skill, she was untiring in doing it over and

over again till she had conquered all its difficulties and accomplished her own end. So now, having set heart and mind on getting well, she did her utmost to keep herself from that feverish anguished sorrow, and to still that thirst for his presence, which she knew would only keep her farther from him; and though the bitterness of grief eat into her heart with suffering proportionate to her passionate joy in those brief hours she had known of love in its deep and mutual ecstasy, Alma had hope and resolution to recover, and strength came to her day by day.

Reuben's close cottage was not one to facilitate her restoration: light, air, comforts, atmosphere, all that were most needed for her, were inaccessible there. She had barely strength enough to be lifted from her bed without fainting, and Montessor saw that without the freedom of air, the space, the delicate entourages to which she was accustomed, she would never be better. He was interested in her; her simplicity and fervor in speaking of De Vigne attracted a man who knew life too well not to know the real from the spurious in such things; he had been but a year or so married to a wife whom he loved tenderly, and perhaps her youth made him compassionate on Alma's, and her affection made him believe in the patient's affection for De Vigne, as he might not otherwise have been so ready to do. Miss Russell had faintly hoped that her patrons, considering that they were invariably talking very largely of their charities, might have taken compassion upon her poor little pupil, and since the infectiousness of brain fever was of course but an excuse, might have offered her, when she was able to be moved, one of the many rooms of their large and stately rectory. But the rector—and I must say it is somewhat a peculiarity of the Church—did not much admire being expected to act up to his own sermons, (what man, lay or clerical, by the

way, ever does ?) and if he had been at the Pool of Bethesda would have turned up his aristocratic hooked nose at the dingy beggars, and would never have helped one of them in, unless, indeed, one of them had been a paralytic old Pharisee, whose horn was very high indeed, and who would have proclaimed from the house-top the good deed which our saints, though they profess not to let their left hand know it, are sorely uneasy unless their neighbors throughout Jerusalem are fully aware of and duly accredit.

Miss Russell's rector, like many another rector, since he "knew nothing of the young person," would not have thought of wasting one of his spare beds on a girl "of no connections," and "you know, my dear, for anything we can tell, perhaps of no very purely moral character," as he remarked to his wife, previous to rushing into church in his stiff and majestic surplice, and giving for his text the story of Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene. Ah me! we cry out to our neighbors about their purely moral characters till we entirely forget that charity covereth (*i.e.* throweth a veil over, as a man who *does* preach in his pulpit, but does act his own words out I really believe to the best of his sight and his strength, translated it to me once) a multitude of sins. Montessor was not counted a good man by his rector; indeed, having certain latitudinarian opinions of his own, consequent on his study of man and of nature, and not always keeping them to himself as privately as prudence and his practice might have suggested, was somewhat of a thorn in the rector's side, especially as in argument Montessor inevitably floored him with extreme humiliation, and the rector being once driven to define Grace by him was compelled to the extremely uncomfortable and illogical answer, for which he would have scolded his wife's youngest Sunday scholar, "Well, dear me;—why, sir, grace *is* grace!" Montessor,

moreover, did not always go to church, but quite au contraire, and preferred strolling under the solemn aisles of Windsor Forest, and thinking of that great God of Nature whom men lower in their sermons and exclude from their lives. Montessor, as you will perceive, was not a good man—a most dangerous infidel and latitudinarian fellow altogether; and there were two people of whose ultimate damnation the rector was quite comfortably secure; they were Montessor and his wife. Therefore, too, you see it was very natural for poor Miss Russell to look to the rector, and not to Montessor, for charity; but—and I fancy that is as natural too—it was in him and not in the rector that she found it. Montessor knew that a week or two in a house like his might secure Alma's restoration, while she might linger on and on for an indefinite time in the oppressive atmosphere of Reuben's cottage, close and dark as all such tenements are, with an odor in them painful to olfactory nerves unaccustomed to it. As soon as she was able to be moved, Alma, too weak to protest against his will, was carried to his house; and whether it was the light and air of her bed-room there, with the soft September air blowing in, full of the fragrance of the garden flowers, which had imperceptible effect upon her health, or whether because having moved from the cottage where she had suffered so much* seemed really a step nearer De Vigne, since it was a step nearer her recovery, Alma—the elasticity and vigor of youth being strong in her—did daily grow stronger and better, and now began to recover as rapidly as she had been slow to do so before. Her gratitude, too, to Montessor spurred her on, for Alma was touched by the slightest kindness, and was of too grateful a nature, however absorbed in her own sorrow, not to rouse herself to appreciate and thank them for the care and the generous kindness both he and his wife lavished upon her

Mrs. Montessor, with all a girl's love of romance, had taken a deep and wonderful interest in her husband's patient when she heard of her mysterious discovery in the forest, and her attachment for this officer, whose memory was the sole thing that remained on her mind during her unconsciousness, and whose name was first upon her lips on her awakening. She received her in her house with delight, bid her cook make every dish she could imagine to tempt her, indeed would have killed his patient speedily with her delicacies if Montessor had not prevented her, and felt a not unpardonable curiosity to know her story, and how she came there that midsummer night. This Alma, as soon as she was able, told her, having no reason not to do so, and full still of a horrible dread and terror for fear Vane Castleton should ever find her out again. She spoke very little of De Vigne; his name was too dear to her to bring it forward more than she could help, but all the rest she told frankly and fully, as was due, to her new-found friends; and Mrs. Montessor, with much hot vituperation upon Castleton, whom she regarded as a brute and ogre who deserved the fiercest chastisement—a feeling in which I think most of us can sympathize—told the story to her husband over their dinner-table.

As soon as ever she could gather her thoughts, and had strength enough to write, Alma's first effort was to pen to De Vigne the whole detail of Castleton's plot, pouring out to him her grief, her longing to be with him, her prayers to be allowed to hear from him if not to go to him, her anguish at the idea of his danger, all she had suffered, thought, and felt, all the maddening despair with which she had awoke from her illness to find him gone and herself forsaken, upbraiding him for having credited such faithlessness and sin of his own little Alma,—pouring out to him, in a word, all her passionate love and sorrow, as

Alma, to whom feeling usually gave, rather than checked, eloquence, like the improvisatrice of her half-country, had always poured out to him her wildest imaginings, her deepest feelings. When that was done—and, weak as she was, it was some days before she could write to him as she would—Alma sank back on her pillows with a weary sigh, and more bitter tears than even she, checkered as her short life had been, had hitherto ever shed. Many weary weeks must come and pass away, many weary days must dawn, and many nights must fall, before she could have an answer; and even now, before that reached him, what evil might not have befallen him! and from the phantasma of her fears Alma turned, sick and faint, away, yearning—as the bird, whose pinions are tiring in its long flight across the desert, yearns for the sweet ripple of the water-springs and the perfumes of the citron groves—to be gathered in his arms once more, and hear his love-words whispered in her ear.

The letter was directed to “Major De Vigne, British Army, Crimea,” and Montessor himself posted it. As he told her so, the deep flush upon her cheeks and the fervor of her thanks for so trifling an action showed him how near her heart its speedy voyage lay.

“Would it cost much money to go to the Crimea?” she asked him, as he paid her his visit that evening, fixing her dark-blue eyes on his with that earnest and brilliant regard which, when she had fixed her heart on any request, usually won it for her from all men.

“A great deal, my little lady,” answered Montessor, gently. Though he might be a skeptic, he never sneered at his wife’s or Alma’s wildest thoughts; perhaps because he liked the enthusiastic romance which spoke of youth and unworn hearts; probably because he felt and acknowledged that in both it was *real*, with no taint of exaggeration or affectation.

"How much?" asked Alma, wistfully.

"A hundred or two, at the least."

Her lips quivered, and her head drooped with a heavy sigh.

"Ah! and I have nothing! But, Mr. Montessor, are there not nurses with the army? Have I not heard that ladies sometimes go to be in the hospitals? Could not I go out to him in that way?"

Montessor smiled, amused yet touched.

"Poor child! you are much fit for a nurse! What do you know of wounds, of sickness, of death? What qualification have you to induce them to give you such an office? Do you think they would take such a fair little face as yours among the sick-wards? No, no; that is impracticable. You must *wait*: the lesson hardest of all to learn—one, I dare say, you have never had to learn at all."

It was true she never had, and it was one she never would learn all her life long; she might be chained down, but she would never grow to wait with patience; she would fret her life out like a fettered nightingale, but she would never endure confinement calmly like a cage bird. She had a wild longing to go to the Crimea; not only would she have gone thither had she been rich, but had she but known of any means she would have worked her way there at any cost or any pain, only to be near him in his danger, and to hear him say that for all the witness against her he knew that she was his and his alone. But Alma, poor, unaided, unbacked, utterly ignorant of the forms, the expenses, the necessities of traveling, wholly unfit, with all her spirit and dauntlessness, for the rôle of an "unprotected young lady," Alma had to bow before that curse, under which much that is strongest, noblest, and best in Genius, Talent, and Love has gone down, never to be able to

shake off the cruel chain upon their wings, the curse of—want of money! She had no money, poor child; barely enough, not nearly enough without Miss Russell's aid, to defray all that she owed to Montessor, to her nurse, to Reuben; how was she, without money, to traverse those weary miles that stretched between her and her lover, across which no cry of hers could reach, no love of hers could shield him? In those days it was only her passionate devotion to De Vigne, and her own determinate will to keep her brain calm and regain health, if she could, to go to him, or find him again by some means, which alone bore her up under the agony she suffered.

Of course she was desirous to leave Montessor's house as soon as she was able, and, warmly as they pressed her to stay, she fixed the earliest day she could bear the drive for her return to St. Crucis. She had not waited till her return to know when and how De Vigne had heard of her flight with Castleton; what he had said when, for the first time in all his visits there, he had found her absent—absent, too, the day after the very night on which she had sworn to him such unswerving love. Old Mrs. Lee wrote her word, as calm lookers-on often do write of the fiercest passions and bitterest sorrows that pass unseen before their very eyes, "The Major called, my darling child, and I telled him all as I thought it to be, but as, thank Almighty God, it wasn't. He took it uncommon quiet like, and walked out, and I haven't seen not nothing of him since."

How deep into Alma's heart went those few common words "uncommon quiet like, and then walked out!" What volumes they spoke to her of that mighty anguish of passion, as still and iron-bound as the ice mountains of the Arctic, as certain to burst and break away, bringing death and destruction in its fall! More still for the suffering she had caused him than for that which had fallen

upon herself, did poor little Alma mourn for the impetuous impulse which had flung her so unconscious an assistant into Castleton's plot. "If he die I shall have murdered him! Oh! my God, shield him and bring him back to me, or let me go to him!" that was the one cry, the one prayer that went up from her heart every hour, nay, every moment, for if her lips spoke other words her thoughts never wavered from De Vigne.

The day was fixed for her to leave Windsor for St. Cruis. Montessor and his wife were both unwilling to part with her; for her story, her winning face, her strange, passionate love, of which she so seldom spoke, but which was the very life of her life and soul of her soul, had all won them to her. Alma had a strange fascination for everybody; there was a peculiar, nameless charm in her dark-blue eloquent eyes, her half-foreign impetuosity and fervor, joined to the childlike softness of her voice and manners. She was sure to win friends among the noble-hearted and liberal-minded, as she would, had she mingled in society, have been certain to have gained unnumbered foes among her own sex and lovers among ours, as women worth the most always do.

"The Molyneux are going to Paris, Lena," said Montessor, the morning before Alma left them.

"Indeed! Why and when?"

"Well, in the first place, Miss Molyneux must have change of air somewhere; she will go into consumption, ten to one. I suggested Italy, but she would not hear of it; her mother Paris, to which her ladyship has certain religious, social, and fashionable leanings, all drawing her at once; and to that she assented, poor girl! Pour cause, it is nearer the Crimea!"

"Is that Violet Molyneux?" asked Alma, eagerly. They had fancied her asleep upon the sofa, but she had only

closed her eyes to hide the unshed tears that rose from her heart and gathered under her silky lashes with every thought of De Vigne. "Is she not married to Colonel Sabretasche?"

"No!" answered Lena Montessor, with a sigh of profoundest sympathy and pity. "A fortnight before their wedding-day, his first wife, whom he fully believed to be dead, came forward and asserted her rights. I never heard all the details, but it is easy to fancy what they both suffered. Now he has gone to the Crimea—but do you know her, Alma?"

"Did I know her? Yes! and how bright, how lovely, how radiant she looked! Oh, Heaven! how she must hate that woman!" And Alma shuddered as she thought how *she* would have hated the Trefusis if that lie, that fable, had been true.

"And the wife, eh, what pity for her, Miss Tressillian!" smiled Montessor.

Alma shook her head. "None! If she had left Colonel Sabretasche all those years, long enough to make him think her dead, she could care nothing for him."

"Perhaps *he* left *her*. There are always two sides to a question, mesdemoiselles, and nobody can ever judge between a husband and a wife."

"Now don't talk didactically," cried his own wife. "If *we* ever come before the Divorce Court, I shall have nothing to do but to show in court, and my judges will give me my verdict as they gave Phryne hers, for my perfect loveliness! I won't have you defend that horrid first wife. A man as handsome as I know Colonel Sabretasche is could have no sins, and I should never forgive an angel who had clouded the light in Violet Molyneux's lovely eyes."

Montessor laughed; *he* would not have forgiven an

angel for quenching the light in the eyes that looked at him then so mischievously.

"She is very lovely, I admit, and little deserves the sad fate she has met with now. It is pitiable to see her; perhaps an ordinary observer might not notice her so much, for it is a romantic fallacy that, in youth, sorrow wrinkles the brow and whitens the hair at one coup; if it did, most people would be aged before their twenties! but, to a medical man, the utter despair of the eyes, and that dangerous hectic flushing up so strongly one minute, and fading so suddenly till she is as white as the dead, tell him more than enough. She holds herself as fully bound to Colonel Sabretasche, I believe, as though their engagement had never been broken; Lord Molyneux sanctions the idea, but you may be sure my lady will do her best to overcome it."

"Is Colonel Sabretasche gone to the Crimea?" asked Alma. It touched her strangely, this story of Violet Molyneux, that radiant belle whom she had once so much envied. How utterly had all their fates changed since that brilliant ball in Lowndes Square but three months before, when such perfect and cloudless happiness had seemed so secure to Violet; when on Alma had only dawned the first roseate hue of unconscious love, and all the bitterness of passion was as yet far away from her!

"Yes, he was ordered off with his Lancers; and so thorough a soldier as I have heard he was, with all his dolce and love of ease, would hardly have refused the campaign, even had it taken him from his first bridal days."

"No; but she would have gone with him!—and they are going to Paris, you say?"

"Yes, I recommended it; so did Dr. Watson, when he sounded Violet's lungs, and agreed with me that there was no mischief yet, though there may be before long; if

change of air does not send her cough away, they must take her to Florence or Biarritz. After her parting with Colonel Sabretasche, she lay where he had left her, in a dead swoon, from which they could not wake her. They sent for the physicians and for myself, and all the night through she had a succession of fainting fits; since then she has never recovered; she will smile, she will talk to her mother, to her friends; but her health suffers for all that. A casual observer, as I say, would not notice it; but I can see that it is an even chance if she ever recover the shock given her in the very time of her fullest joy, her utmost security. Lady Molyneux would like to have a companion for her in Paris; the Viscountess will have a thousand religious excitements and social amusements, in which her daughter will not participate, and she would like to find somebody to keep Violet company and rouse her, as Lady Molyneux will have neither time nor inclination to do. I did not know—I thought would you——” And Montessor hesitated; for though he knew how unprovided for and unprotected Alma was, he had too much intuitive delicacy and generosity to like to touch upon it.

“Would they take me?” said Alma, lifting her head. The sentence “Paris is nearer the Crimea” rang in her ear: who could tell but what, once there, she might get still nearer to him; besides, Violet would correspond with Colonel Sabretasche; Sabretasche and De Vigne were most intimate friends; they were in the same arm of the service, they would be together; she would be far nearer De Vigne with the Molyneux than in the dreary solitude of St. Crucis, where, forsaken by him whose presence had once illumined it, she felt that she could never endure to be left alone to watch, to wait, to think; dreading every hour, and ignorant whether each of them might not bring the tidings of his death, every sun that set and dawned might

not shine upon the battle-field, where he lay, his life quenched and gone forever.

"Would you go?"

"Yes," said Alma, pressing her little hands convulsively.

"Yes—if I am free to leave them when I will. Miss Molyneux was very kind to me; I think she would take me if she knew."

"Miss Molyneux has not heard anything of it; it is her mother's idea; but I will mention it to the Viscountess when I go to town to-morrow," said Montessor. "Since you know them, I have no doubt she will be very happy to give you the preference, and change of air will do you good as well as her daughter."

Alma did not answer him; she thought that both to Violet and her air and scene mattered little, while to all climes they took with them the curse of absence from those that both held dearer than life itself.

Montessor was as good as his word. Some years before, Violet's brother, then a graceless Etonian, now a young attaché to the British Legation at Paris, had been nearly drowned in the Thames, and had been pulled out at last to go through a severe attack of bronchitis, which all but cost him his life, would probably have done so quite but for Montessor, to whom Jockey Jack was so grateful for saving his only heir's life—a life so valueless in itself, but so all-important, since the continuation of the Molyneux line depended on that empty-headed and bad-hearted Oppidan—that he gave the doctor the most beautiful mare in his stables, and had him called in whenever there was any illness in the family, though Montessor, at the onset, had mortally offended Madame by assuring her she would have very good health if she would only leave off sal-volatile, and get up before one o'clock in the day. On that Lady Molyneux had nothing more to

say to him till her pet physician, who had kept her good graces by magnifying her migraines and flattering her nerves, once very nearly killed her by doctoring her for phthisis when her disease was but the more unpoetic ailment of liver, and she was glad to have Montessor back again. Since that time he had always had a certain influence over the Viscountess, possibly because he was the only man who had seen her without her rouge, and told her the truth courteously but uncompromisingly, and when he mentioned Alma as a companion for Violet, her ladyship graciously acquiesced. "Miss Tressillian? She did not recollect the name. Very likely she had seen her, but she really could not remember. A little artist, was she? Oh, she thought she *had* some recollection of a little girl Violet patronized, but she couldn't remember. If Mr. Montessor recommended her, that was everything; as long as she was ladylike and of unimpeachable moral character, that was all she required. She only wanted her to be with them in case Violet were unwell or declined society. She must be free to leave them any day she chose? What a very singular stipulation! However, rather than have any more trouble about it, would he have the goodness to tell her she would give her fifty guineas and her traveling expenses; and they should leave London that day week."

"Fifty guineas! Less than her maid makes by her place!" thought Montessor, as he threw himself into a Hansom to drive back to the Waterloo station. He was essentially a generous man himself; he had no scant of benevolence about him; he considered that to people delicately nurtured, with refined tastes and quick sensibilities, the struggles, the mortification, the narrowed and cruel lines of poverty are far harder than to the poor, born amid squalor, nurtured in deprivation, whose most resplendent memories and dreams are of fat bacon and fried

potatoes. He was generous, but discriminatingly so ; and though he compelled his just dues from the man who had lamb and peas at their earliest, while by a woe-begone face and dextrous text he was making the rector believe him an object of profoundest pity, Montessor would not take a farthing from the young girl, on whose delicate organization and quick susceptibilities he knew the poverty, from which her own talents had alone protected her, and from which in illness they could not guard her, must prey most heavily. I need not say how Alma felt and took his kindness ; felt it with the warmth of a heart touched by the slightest thought of her into gratitude deep and lasting ; took it with the frankness of a nature too generous itself to harbor false pride, thinking, indeed, of a time when she should be able to repay it—not to rid herself of the obligation, but to show him her own undying gratitude.

Alma *was* grateful ; her nature more quick at appreciating, more tenacious in remembering kindness done her than any one's I ever knew ; all the charity and tenderness shown her in her suffering in Windsor sank deep into her heart, never to be effaced or forgotten in happier hours, should such ever come to her. Still when, the day before her departure from England, she gazed round the room at St. Crucis, where the pictures he had praised, the flowers he had given, the brilliant bird that syllabled his name, the very sunshine that had never seemed bright save in his presence ; the room where his burning love-vows had been spoken, where his passionate caresses had spoken eloquence stronger than words, where everything breathed of him whose presence was life to her, and absence death, Alma threw herself upon the ground with more bitter tears than De Vigne—many women as had loved him—had ever had shed for him. “Granville, Granville, my *only* friend, why have you forsaken me ?”

PART THE TWENTY-SECOND.

I.

ONE OF THOSE WHOM ENGLAND HAS FORGOTTEN.

THE chill Crimean winds blew from the north of Sebastopol, and the dust whirled and skerried before our eyes, as we kept the line in front of Cathcart's Hill on the morning of the 8th September, while the Guards stood ready in Woronzoff-road, and the Second and Light Divisions moved down to the trenches, and the Staff stationed themselves in the second parallel of the Green Hill Battery, and the amateurs, who had come out to see what was doing in the Crimea, as they went other years to Norwegian fishing or Baden roulette, were scattered about in yachting costume, and stirred to deep excitement as the Russian shells began to burst among us and the bombs to fall with thuds loud enough to startle the strongest nerves.

What would young ladies at home, full of visions of conquering heroes and myrtle and bay leaves, and all the pomp and circumstance of war, have said if, in that cold, dusty, raw Crimean morning, they had seen General Simpson, with only nose and eyes exposed, coddled up in a great-coat, and General Jones, a *vrai héros* in spite of all costume, in his red bonnet de nuit—a more natural accompaniment to a Caudle lecture than to a siege—and Sir Richard, with his pocket-handkerchief tied over his ears after the manner of old ladies afflicted with catarrh? Ah me! it was not much like Davy Baird leading the forlorn hope under the hot sun of Seringapatam, or Wellington, “pale but ever collected,” giving his prompt orders from

the high ground behind San Christoval! Yet, God knows, there was daring and gallantry enough that day to have made of the Redan a second Ciudad Rodrigo; that it was not so, was no fault of the troops; the men whom Unett and Windham tossed up to lead would, had they been allowed, have given England as complete a success as they gave her invincible pluck, and the dead bodies piled high on the slopes of the Great Redan were offered up as cheerfully and as nobly as though the fancied paradise of the Mahometan soldier awaited them, instead of the ordinary rewards of the British one—abuse and oblivion.

Heaven forefend that I should attempt to give you a description of the morning of the 8th. William Russell has told all our stories for us better than we could any of us tell them for ourselves; a man engaged in a battle or an attack can only see things as they go on around him, specially when stationed, as we were, at some little distance from the actual encounter; while smoke and dust and a leaden-colored atmosphere all interfered with a view of those “dun-colored, rugged parapets,” where young boys fresh from their native villages were sent to fight some of the best-drilled regiments of Europe.

The tricolor waved from the parapet of the Malakoff, and Chapman's Battery sent up the sparks of four rockets against the raw gray clouds. Our men at the signal left the fifth parallel, and the Russian muskets swept along their ranks to such deadly result that in the few minutes' passage upward to the salient, Shirley, Van Straubenzee, Handcock, Hammond, Welsford, most of their leaders and many of their officers, were hors de combat, if not dead. Then, as all the world knows, there were but half a dozen ladders, and those few were too short! But the officers led on and the troops followed them, jumping down into the ditch fifteen feet deep, and scaled the parapet, and

once in, the carnage began, where, "fed by feeble dribblets," and unable to form into line, not all the heroism of their leaders or the courage of their officers could prevent their being shot down *pêle-mêle*. We could see little beyond the great dull parapets of the Redan, and the troops that were pouring into and over it, and, though they were forced back again under the dense smoke of the Russian musketry, twice capturing the position, and twice pushed back down the slopes, slippery with human blood and piled with human bodies. It was afterward, from the wounded that were brought down the Woronzoff-road, and from the remnant that came back unscathed from the reeking salient, that we heard the detail of the struggle in which we could take no part; heard how Windham held the triangle with the storm of shot seething round him, and crossed alone, amid the death-rattle of grape and rifle bullets, with his gallant, "Now mind, let it be known, in case I am killed, why I went away"—to demand too late the support which should have been there unasked; heard how Pat Mahoney fell dead in the embrasure, shouting beside his colonel, "Come on, boys, come on!" how Lysons, of the 23d, shot through the thigh, still kept his ground, cheering on his men to the very last; how Handcock was shot through the brain, and his body carried past the picket-house, where his wife was watching for him, back out of that fatal salient; how Molesworth sprang upon the parapet and lighted his cigar, smoking and cheering on his fellows to follow him. And we heard, too, what all the individual daring could not retrieve to any of us, least of all to those who did all that men could do to fight against the disadvantages with which the attack on the Redan was encircled at every side,—we heard how the fire from the traverses killed off the storming party so rapidly that there was no force left large enough to sweep across; how the gabions gave way

and broke down with the men gathered upon them; and Rowland, trying to charge across the open space with his handful of men, had almost all of them shot down one after the other; how the officers, picked out by the Russian fusillade, fell on every side, marked out by their own daring, and their men, bewildered for want of leaders, got mixed together, and, rushing in inextricable confusion to the front, were swept down by the Russians, who, covered by their breastworks, could be but little injured by our fire.

We heard how three times Windham sent for the support, without which nothing decisive could be done in that fatal scene of carnage, where the British, unbacked, had nothing but broken ranks to oppose to the steady fire of the enemy and to the fresh troops who were swarming from the town and the evacuated Malakoff. We heard how, when at last he had leave "to take the Royals," the permission came too late; how the Russians, collecting some thousands of their troops behind the breastworks, charged our troops with the bayonet, while their rear ranks poured over their heads a volley upon our men, who averaged one against three Muscovites, and were unable to form from the narrow neck of the salient. We heard how hand-to-hand our plucky fellows stood their ground against the granite mass, that, swelling every moment from the rear, pressed down upon them, till those who had held the salient, unsupported for an hour and three-quarters, under a fire that thinned their ranks as a scythe mows down meadow grass, grappling to the last with the Russians in the embrace of death, were forced from the loose earth and breaking gabions that made their ground, and, pelted with great stones, were driven down by the iron tramp that crushed recklessly alike friend and foe, till slipping, panting, bleeding, exhausted, *pêle-mêle*, they fell on to the mass of bayonets, muskets, and quivering human life that lay mingled

together in the ditch below, the men rolling over each other like loose stones down a crevasse; the living crushed by the dead, the dying struggling under the weight of the wounded; the scarps giving way and burying not a few alive, while those who could struggle from the horrible heap of human life, where the men lay four deep, ran for life and death to reach the English trench. We heard that, and more too—longer details than can find space here—and, if we were not “Christian” to swear as fiercely as we did to avenge the Redan; if we had not done so, we should scarcely have been human—we should assuredly have not been English. Sad stories passed from one another. We were all down in the mouth that night; for though the officers had been as game and as gallant as men could be, flinging down their lives as of no account, their men had not imitated them; and it was hardly the tale that we, after the long winter of ’54–’55, and the weary, dreary, hopeless months of inaction, had hoped to be rewarded with, by sending home to England. Wellington was wont to say that the saddest thing, after a defeat, was a victory. I think his iron heart would have broken over the loss of human life, the waste of heroic self-devotion that was seen on the parapets of the Redan.

We knew that Curly was to lead the —th with the Light Division that day, and we thought of him anxiously enough when we saw from Cathcart’s Hill the smoke pouring out from the rugged parapets, and the troops fighting their way over, only to be sent forth again decimated and exhausted.

I saw him early on the morning of the 8th, when we were all looking forward to the attack, and hoping, though but faintly, for success that should make the long-watched city ours. I saw him about half-past six, before we were posted, as he was chatting with some other fellows of the

Light Division about the coming assault, which they were longing for as ardently as in days passed away they had longed for the dawn of the 1st or the 12th. Curly was in better spirits than he had been since he landed in the Crimea: he put me strangely in mind of the little fellow I had first known at Frestonhills, as he stood in that careless nondescript costume which we dandies of the Queen's had adopted, his old gay *débonnaire* smile on his lips, a cap much the worse for wind and weather on those silky yellow locks that we had teased his life out about in the old school-days; a pipe of good Turkish tobacco peering out from beneath his long blonde moustaches à la Hongrois. I had not seen him look so much like his old gay light-hearted self since the campaign began; and as we paced past him in the raw gray morning, I laughingly wished him good luck; he laughed, too, as he told us he was going in for all the honors now, and should have a clasp the more to his medals than we. De Vigne, as we passed, pulled up his horse for a second, bent from his saddle, and gave him his hand, with a sudden impulse. Bitter words had been between them—words such as he had found it hard to pardon; but now his old warm love for Curly rose up in him, and, forgetting or forgiving all, he looked on him kindly, almost wistfully, and offered his Frestonhills pet as warm a grasp as before Alma Tressillian and their mutual love for her had come between them. For the first moment Curly's eyes flashed with angry fire; then the better spirit in him conquered, his hand closed firm and warm on De Vigne's, and they looked at one another as they had used to do in days gone by, before the love of woman had parted them.

There was no time for speech; that cordial shake of their hands was their silent greeting and farewell, and we left Curly laughing and chatting with his pipe in his lips,

and his lithe, youthful figure standing out against the gray cold sky, while we rode onward to form the line on Cathcart's Hill. I think De Vigne thought more than once of his old school pet when from our post we saw the ramparts of the Redan belching forth fire and smoke, and the ambulances coming down the Woronzoff Road with their heavy and pitiful burdens. Both he and I, I fancy, thought a good deal about Curly that day leading his Light Bobs on to the Russian fusillade. We saw them through the clouds of dust and smoke scale the parapet, with Curly at their head, some of the foremost to enter the Redan; we lost them amid the obscurity which the fire of the musketry and the flames of the burning embrasure raised around the scene of carnage and confusion, and whether he was there among the remnant who were forced over the parapet and fell, or jumped, *pêle-mêle*, into that mass of human misery below, where English pluck was still so strong among them that some laughs they say were heard at their own misery, we could not tell. If I were a believer in presentiments, which I am not, having seen too much real life to have time to accredit the mystic, I could fancy our thoughts of Curly were a foreboding of his fate. But a very few out of the gallant —th lived through the struggle in the salient, and the perilous passage back to our own advanced parallel; there were but a very few left of the old veterans, and the young recruits, who had gone up that morning to the assault of the Redan, with devotion enough in their commanders to have made of it a second Badajoz, and poor Curly, their Colonel, was not among them — not even among the wounded in the temporary hospitals; but late that night, Kennedy, one of his sergeants, told to De Vigne and me and a few other men another of those stories of individual heroism so great in their example, so unfortunate in their

reward; telling it in rough, brief words, not picturesquely or poetically, yet with an earnestness that gave it eloquence to us, with those frowning ramparts in front and those crowded hospitals behind:

“We was a’most the first into the Redan, Major. When I see the ladders, so few, and what there was on ’em so short, I began to think as how we should never get in at all; but Colonel Brandling, he leaped into the ditch and scrambled up the other side as quick as a cat, with a cheer to do your heart good, and we went a’course after him and sealed the parapet, while the Russians ran back and got behind the traverses to fire upon us as soon as we got atop. What possessed ’em I don’t know, Major, but you’ve heard that some of our men began loading and file-firing instead of follering their officers to the front; so many trench-bred infantry men *will* keep popping away forever if you let ’em; but the Colonel led on to the breastwork with his cigar in his mouth, just where he’d put it for a lark when he jumped on the parapet. There was nobody to support us, and our force weren’t strong enough to carry it, and we had to go back and get behind the traverses, where our men were firing on the Russians, and there we stayed, sir, packed together as close as sheep in a fold, firing into the Redan as long as our powder lasted. I can’t tell you, Major, very well how it all went on; it wasn’t a right assault like, it was all hurry-scurry and confusion, and though the officers died game, they couldn’t form the troops ’cause they were so few, sir, and the salient so narrow. But it was the Colonel I was to tell you about, Major. I was beside him a’most all the time. At first he seemed as if nothing *would* hit him; one ball knocked his cap off, and another grazed his hair. He had as near shaves as Colonel Windham, but he took it all as careless as if he was at a ball, and he just

turned to me, sir, with his merry smile: 'Good fun, eh, Kennedy?' Them was the last words he spoke, sir. Just at that minute the enemy charged us with the bayonet, and the devils behind 'em began to pour volleys on us from the breastwork. Four of them Russians closed round the Colonel, and he'd nothing but his sword against their cursed bayonets. I closed with one on 'em; he was as hard as death to grip with. The Colonel killed two of 'em offhand, though they was twice as big as he, but the third, just as his arm was lifted, ran him right through the left lung, and a ball from them devils on the breastwork cut off one of his feet, just as the shot cut off Major Trowbridge's last year. Then he fell straight down, Major, of course, and I was a going to fight my way to him and carry him off in my arms, and I *would* ha' done it, sir, too, but the Russians pressed so hard on the front ranks that they pushed us straight off the parapet, and I only caught a sight of the Colonel lifting himself up on his elbow, and waving us on with a smile—God bless him!—and then I fell over into the ditch, with Pat O'Leary atop of me, and I see him no more, Major, and he must be dead, sir, or else a prisoner in that confounded city."

And honest Kennedy, whose feeling had carried him beyond recollection of delicate language or other presence than his own, stopped abruptly. In his own words, he "felt like a fool," for Curly, like Eman of the 41st, was loved by all the men who served under him.

De Vigne set his teeth hard as he listened; he turned away, sick at heart. Memories of his Frestonhills pet thronged upon him: the little fellow who had been so eager for his notice, so proud of his patronage; the merry, light-hearted child, with his golden locks and his fearless spirits; the wild young Cantab, with his larks and his deviltry; the dandy Guardsman about town, so game

in the hunting-field, so bored in the ball-room; the warm, true, honest heart, unstained by the world he lived in; the friend, the rival, who had loved *his* love more unselfishly than he. Poor little Curly!—and he was lying yonder, behind those smoking ramparts, wounded and a prisoner—perhaps dead!

For an instant De Vigne's eyes flashed with eagle glance over the stormed city, lying there grim and gaunt, in the shadow of the gray-hued day, and but that his duty as a soldier held him back, I believe he would not have hesitated to cross those death-strewn lines alone, and rescue Curly or fall with him.

The Crimea is not so far distant but that the world knows how we were awakened the morning after by the Russian general's masterly retreat, by thunder louder than that which had stunned our ears for twelve months long, by the explosion of the Flagstaff and Garden batteries, by the tramp of those dense columns of Russian infantry passing to the opposite side, by the glare of the flames from Fort Nicholas, by the huge columns of black smoke rising from Fort Paul, by the sight of that fair and stately Empress of the Euxine abandoned and in flames! Little did the people at home—hearing Litanies read and hymns sung in the village churches nestling among the fresh English woodlands—dream what a grand funeral mass for our dead was shaking the earth with its echoes that Sabbath morning in the Crimea.

It was as late as Wednesday before De Vigne and I got passes from the adjutant-general's office, and went into the town before whose granite ramparts we had lain watching and waiting for twelve weary months. What a road it was through the French works! a very Fair Rosamond's maze of trenches, zigzags, and parallels, across the French sap, where every square inch might be marked "Sta

viator, heroem calcas;" treading our way through the heaps of dead, where the men lay so thickly one on the other, just as they had fallen, shoulder to shoulder, till we were inside the Malakoff. It was horrible there, even to us, used as we were to bloodshed, and to mangling, and to human suffering in every form of torture. I wonder how it would have suited the nerves of those gentlemen who sit at home at ease, and dictate from their arm chairs how this should have been done, and that should have been avoided? I fancy Messieurs the Volunteer Rifles, who think themselves just now "so much better than a standing army," taken in to such a scene after one of their days of ball-practice or Hyde Park turn out, would very likely turn sick and faint, and not find "soldiering" quite so pleasant as firing at a butt and toasting the ladies. Four piles of dead were heaped together like broken meat on a butcher's stall—not a whit more tenderly—and cleared out of the way like carrion; the ground was broken up into great pools of blood, black and noisome; troops of flies were swarming like mimic vultures on bodies still warm, on men still conscious, crowding over the festering wounds, (for these men had lain there since Saturday at noon!) buzzing their death-rattle in ears already maddened with torture; *that* was what we saw in the Malakoff, what we saw a little later in the Great Redan, where, among cook-houses brimful of human blood, English and Russian lay clasped together in a fell embrace, petrified by death; where the British lay in heaps, mangled beyond recognition by their dearest friends, or scorched and blackened by the recent explosions, and where—how strange they looked there!—there stood outside the entrance of one of the houses a vase of flowers and a little canary, rebuking, as it were, with their soft and gentle beauty, the outrage of Nature that stretched around them. But we did not stay to notice the once

white and stately city, now ruined and defaced, with its snow-like walls, now black and broken with our shot; we went straight on toward Fort Paul, as yet untouched, where stood the hospital, that chamber of horrors, that worse than charnel-house, from which strong men retreated, unable to bear up against the loathsome terrors it inclosed. That long, low room, with its arched roof, its square pillars, its dim, cavernous light coming in through the shattered windows, was a sight worse than all the fabled horrors of painter, or poet, or author; full of torment—torment to which the cruelest torture of Domitian and Nero were mercy—a hell where human frames were racked with every possible agony, not as a chastisement for sin, but as a reward for heroism! De Vigne, iron as his nerves were counted, used as he had been to death and pain, strong soldier as he was, capable of Spartan endurance and braced to English impassibility, closed his eyes involuntarily as he entered, and a shudder run through his frame as he thought of *who* might be lying there among those dead and dying men that the Russian general had abandoned to their fate. There they lay, packed as closely together as dead animals in a slaughter-house—the many Russians, the few English soldiers, who had been dragged there after the assault, to die as they might; they would but have cumbered the retreat, and their lives were valueless now! There they lay: some on the floor that was slippery with blood like a shamble; some on pallets, saturated with the stream that carried away their life in its deadly flow; some on straw, crimson and noisome, the home of the most horrible vermin; some dead hastily flung down to be out of the way, black and swollen, a mass of putrefaction, the eyes forced from the sockets, the tongue protruding, the features distended in hideous grotesqueness; others dead, burnt and charred in the explo-

sion, a heap of blanched bones and gory clothes and blackened flesh, the men who but a few hours before had been instinct with health and hope and gallant fearless life ! Living men in horrible companionship with these corpses, writhing in torture which there was no hand to relieve, no help from heaven or earth to aid, with their jagged and broken limbs twisted and powerless, were calling for water, for help, for pity ; shrieking out in wild delirium or disconnected prayer the name of the woman they had loved or the God that had forsaken them, or rolling beneath their wretched beds in the agony of pain and thirst which had driven them to madness, glaring out upon us with the piteous helplessness of a hunted animal, or the ferocious unconsciousness of insanity.

We passed through one of these chambers of terrors, our hearts sickened and our senses reeling at the hideous sight, the intolerable stench that met us at every step. Great Heaven ! what must those have endured who lay there days and nights with not a drop of water to soften their baked throats, not a kind touch to bind up their gaping wounds, not a human voice to whisper pity for their anguish ; before their dying eyes scenes to make a strong man reel and stagger, and in their dying ears the shrieks of suffering equal to their own, the thunder of exploding magazines, the shock of falling fortresses, the burst of shells falling through the roof, the hiss and crash and roar of the flaming city round them !

We passed through one chamber in which we saw no one who could be Curly, or at least who we could believe was he, for few of the faces there could have been recognized by their nearest and their dearest—for not Edith's quest of Harold wanted so keen an eye of love as was needed to seek for friend or brother in the hospital of Sebastopol.

We entered a second room, where the sights and the odors were yet more appalling than in the first. Beside one pallet De Vigne paused and bent down; then his pale bronze cheek grew white, and he dropped on his knee beside the wretched bed—at last he had found Curly. Poor dear Curly! still alive, in that scene of misery, lying on the mattress that was soaked through with his life-blood, his broken ankle twisted under him, the wound in his shoulder open and festering, his eyes closed, his bright hair dull and damp with the dew of suffering that stood upon his brow, his face of a livid blue-white hue; the gay, gallant, chivalrous English gentleman, thrown down to die as he would not have had a dog left in its suffering. On one side of him was a black charred corpse, swollen in one place, burnt to the bone in another; could that ever have been a living, breathing human soul, with thought and hope and life, loving, acting, aspiring?—the woman that loved him best could not have known him now! On the other side of him, close by, was a young Russian officer but just dead, with an angry frown upon his handsome features, and his hands, small and fair as a girl's, filled with the straw that he had clutched at in his death agony; and between these two dead men lay Curly!

De Vigne knelt down beside him, lifting his head upon his arm. “My God, Arthur, is he dead?”

At the familiar voice his eyes unclosed, first with a dreamy vacant stare in them—his mother's heart would have broken at the wreck of beauty in that face, so fair, so delicate, so handsome but a few days before.

“Curly, Curly, dear old fellow!—don't you know me?”

How soft and gentle was De Vigne's voice as he spoke, with that latent tenderness which, though all had chilled, nothing could wholly banish from his heart!

Curly looked at him dreamily, unconsciously. "What! is that the prayer bell? Is the Doctor waiting?"

His thoughts were back among the old school-days at Frestonhills, when we first met at the old Chancery—when we little thought how we were doomed to part under the murderous shadow of Fort Paul.

De Vigne bent nearer to him. "Look at me, dear old boy. You must know *me*, Curly."

But he did not; his head tossed wearily from side to side, the fever of his wounds had mounted to his brain, and he moaned out delirious disconnected words.

"Why don't they form into line, Kennedy—why don't they form into line? If there were more of us, we could take that breastwork. Water!—water! Is there not a drop of water *anywhere*? We shall die of thirst. I should like to die in harness, but it is hard to die of thirst like a mad dog—like a mad dog—ha! ha!" (Both of us shuddered, as the mocking, hideous laughter rang through the chamber of death.) "Alma!—Alma! Who talked of Alma? Can't you bring her here once, just once, before I die? I think she would be kinder to me now, perhaps; I loved her very much; she did not care for me—she would not care now—she loves De Vigne. You know how I have hated him—my God! how I have hated him—and yet—I loved him once better than any man till *she* came between us. Oh, for God's sake, give me water—water, for the love of Heaven!"

At the muttered raving words De Vigne's face grew as livid for the moment as that of the dead Russian beside him, and his hand trembled as he took a flask from his belt that he had filled with sherry before starting, and held it to Curly's lips. How eagerly he drank and drank, as if life and reason would flow back to him with the draught! For a time it gave him strength to fling off the faintness

and delirium fastening upon him; his eyes grew clearer and softer, and as De Vigne raised him into a sitting posture, and supported him on his arm with all the gentle care of a woman, he revived a little, and looked at him with a conscious and grateful regard.

“De Vigne! How do you come here? Where am I? Oh! I know; is the city taken, then?”

Dying as he was, the old spirit in him rallied and flashed up for a brief moment, while De Vigne told him how the Russians had retreated, leaving Sebastopol in flames. But he was too far gone to revive long; he lay with his head resting on De Vigne’s arm, his eyelids closed again, his breathing faint and quick, all his beauty and his manhood and his strength stricken down into the saddest wreck that human eyes can see and human passions cause. Few could have recognized the once gay, brilliant Guardsman, whom women had loved for his beauty and his grace, in the wounded man who was stretched on that wretched and gore-stained pallet, with his life ebbing away simply for want of that common care that a friendless beggar would have been given at home.

“Is the city won?” he asked again; his low and feeble words scarcely heard in the shrieks, the moans, the muttered prayers, the groans, the oaths around him.

“Yes, dear Curly,” answered De Vigne, not heeding the pestilence of which the air was reeking, and from which many a man as strong as he had turned heart-sick away, while he bent over the death-bed of the friend who so many years ago had been his pet and favorite at Frestonhills.

“I am glad of that,” said Curly, dreamily. “England is sure to win; she is never beaten, is she? I should like to fight once more for her, but I never shall, old fellow; the days here—how many are they?—have done for me.

It is hard to die like this, De Vigne!" And a shudder ran through his frame, that was quivering with every torture. "God knows, I longed to fall in the field, but not a bullet would hit me *there*; however, it does not matter much; it comes to the same thing; and if we won, that is all I care. Tell my mother I die quite content, quite happy. Tell her not to regret me, and that I have thought of her often, very often—she was good and gentle to me always—and bid my father, if he loves me, to be kinder to Gus—Gus was a good old fellow, though we made game of him."

Curly paused; slowly and painfully as he had spoken, the exertion was greater than his fading strength could bear; he, three days before the ideal of manly vigor, grace, and beauty, was powerless as a new-born child, helpless as a paralyzed old man, stricken down like a gracious and beautiful cedar-tree by the hacking strokes of the woodman's axe, its life crushed, its glory withered; only to be piled amid a heap of others to make the bonfires for a conqueror's ovation.

De Vigne bent over him, his cheek growing whiter and whiter as he thought of the boy's early promise and sunny boyhood, and of the man's death amid such horror, filth, and desolation as England would have shuddered to compel her paupers, her convicts, nay, the very unowned dogs about her streets, to suffer in; yet made small count of having forced it on her heroes to die in it like murrained cattle.

"Curly, dear Curly," he whispered, pushing off the clammy hair from Brandling's forehead as gently as any woman, "why talk of death? Once out of this d——d hole," (ah, reverend Christians in England, you would have found it hard to keep to holy language amid such horrors as De Vigne saw then!) "you will get well, old

fellow; you SHALL get well; men have got over wounds ten times more dangerous than yours. We shall have many a day together still at home among the bracken and the stubble."

Curly smiled faintly:

"No, never again. I do not die from the wounds; what has killed me, De Vigne"—and at the memory the old delirious vagueness grew over his eyes, which wandered away into the depths of his dire prison-house—"has been the sights, the scents, the sounds. Oh, my God, the horrors I have seen! In sermons we used to hear them try sometimes to describe a hell; if those preachers had been here as I have been, they would have seen we don't want devils to help us make one—men are quite enough! The stench, the ravings, the roar of the flames around us, the vile creeping things, the blasphemy, the prayers, the horrible thirst—oh, God! I *prayed* for madness, De Vigne; prayed for it as I never prayed for anything in all my life before, and yet I am no coward either!"

He stopped again, a deathly gray spread over his face, and a cold shiver ran through him; the brain, last of all to die, the part immortal and vital amid so much death, triumphed yet awhile over the dissolution of the body. Curly knew that he was dying fast, and signed De Vigne down nearer still to him.

"De Vigne, when the war is over, and you go back to England, first of all try and seek out Alma Tressillian."

The fierce red blood crimsoned De Vigne's very brow; had it been a living and not a dying man who had dared to breathe that name to him, I think he would have provoked a reply he would have little cared to hear. All the mad passion, all the infinite tenderness there were in his heart, stronger still than ever, for his lost love, rose up at the abrupt mention of her.

"Will you promise me?" asked Curly; "to give me peace in my death-hour, promise me."

"No," said De Vigne, between his teeth, clinched like an iron vice. "I cannot promise you. Why should you wish me? You loved her yourself——"

"*Because* I loved her myself, because I love her still; love her so well that it is the thought that in my grave I shall never hear her little soft voice, never see her bright-blue eyes, *never meet her once again*, that makes me shrink from death," said Curly; an unutterable tenderness and despair in those faint broken tones whose last utterance was Alma's name. "I *do* love her, too well to believe what you believe, that she is Vane Castleton's mistress."

De Vigne's hands clinched the straw of the pallet like a man in bodily agony.

"For God's sake be silent! Do not drive *me* to madness. Do you think I should believe it without proof?——"

"On the spur of anger and jealousy you *might*. I do not know, I cannot tell, but I could never think her capable of falsehood, of dishonor," whispered Curly, his breath growing shorter, his eyes more dim, though even on his haggard cheek a flush just rose, wavered, and died out, as he went on: "The day she—she—rejected me I accused her of her love for you, and then she answered me as a woman would hardly have done if she had not cared for you very dearly. Before I left England I left all I had to her; it is little enough, but it will keep her from want. Let some one seek her out, even though she were sunk in the lowest shame, and see that they give her my money. It will save her from the vile abyss to which Castleton would leave her to sink down as she might;—as she must. Promise me, De Vigne—or you, Chevasney—promise me, or I cannot die in peace."

"No, no, *I* promise you."

Hoarse and low as De Vigne's voice was, Curly heard it, a look of gratitude came into the eyes once so bright and fearless, now so dim and dull.

"And if you find that she does love you, you will not reward her for her love as we have done too many?"

Whiter and whiter yet grew De Vigne's face, as his hands clinched harder on the straw of Curly's bed; it was some moments before he spoke:

"*I dare* not promise that. God help me!"

But his words fell on ears deaf at last to the harsh fret and bustle of the world; the faintness of that terrible last struggle of brain and body with the coming chill of death had crept over poor Curly. Sudden shiverings seized him, the mind, vanquished at last, began to wander from earth—whither who can dare to say?—dark-blue shadows deepened under his hollow eyes, the life in him still lingered, as though loth to leave the form so brief a space ago full of such beautiful youth, such gracious manhood; to watch it flickering, struggling, growing fainter and fainter, ebbing away so slowly, so surely, dying out painfully, reluctantly, and to know that it might all have been spared by the common care that at home would be given to a horse, to a dog. God knows, there are sights and thoughts in this world that might well turn men into fiends. He gave one sigh, one heavy sigh deep drawn, and turned upon his side: "My mother—Alma!" Those were the last words he uttered; then—all light died out of his eyes, and the life so young, so brave, so gallant, had fled away forever. De Vigne bent over the reeking straw that was now the funeral bier of as loyal a heart as ever spent itself in England's cause; and bitter tears, wrung from his proud eyes, fell on the cold brow, and the closed features that never more

would light up with the kind, fond, fearless smile of friendship, truth, and welcome.

"I loved him," he muttered. "God help me! Such is ever my fate! My mother—Alma—Curly—*all* lost! And no bullet will come to me!"

In his own arms De Vigne bore Curly out from the loathsome charnel-house, where the living had been entombed with the dead. We buried him with many another, as loyal and gallant as he, who had died on the slope of the Great Redan; and we gave him a soldier's gravestone: a plain white wood cross with his name and his regiment marked upon it, such as were planted in thick, those two long years, on the hills and valleys of the Crimea. God knows if it be there now, or if the Russian peasant has not struck it down and leveled the little mound with his plowshare and the hoofs of his heavy oxen. We have left him in his distant grave. England, whom he remembered in his death-hour, has forgotten him long ere this. Like many another soldier lying in the green sierras of Spain, among the pathless jungle of the tropics, amid the golden corn of Waterloo, and the white headstones upon Cathcart's Hill, the country for which he fell scarcely heard his name, and never heeded his fate. There he lies in his distant grave, the white and gleaming city he died to win stately and restored to all her ancient beauty, the waters of the Alma rolling through its vineyards as peacefully as though no streams of blood had ever mingled with its flow; the waves of the Euxine Sea bearing slowly on the Crimean sands a requiem for the buried dead. There he lies in his distant grave; God requite England if ever she forget him and those who braved his danger, found his death, and shared his grave.

II.

HOW INCONSTANCY WAS VOTED A VIRTUE.

THERE was a ball at the Tuileries. The bells had fired, and the bonfires blazed upward through the still September night in dear old England for the fall of Sebastopol; and M. Louis Napoléon, in imitation of the holy men of old, had been to his *Te Deum* in Notre-Dame, making much of his Mamelon Vert to a populace whom his uncle had won with Mont Tabor and Arcola. There was a ball at the Tuileries, that stately palace that has seen so many dynasties and so many generations, from the polished Pairs de France gathered round the courtly and brilliant Bourbons, to the Maréchaux roturiers, with their strong swords and their broad accents, crowding about the Petit Caporal, taking camp tone into palace salons. There were that night all the English élite, of course, in honor of the "alliance;" and there was among the other foreign guests one Prince Carl Wilhelm Theodore Vollenstein-Seidlitz, an Austrian, with an infinitesimal duchy and a magnificent figure, a tall, strong fellow, with the blue eyes and fair hair of the Teuton race, a man of few words and only two passions: the one for belles tailles, the other for gros jeu.

He had been exchanging a few monosyllables with the Empress, and now leant against the wall of one of the other reception-rooms, regarding, with calm admiration, the beauty of the Duchess d'Albe, until his attention wandered to a new face that he had not seen before, and he turned to a young fellow belonging to the British Legation, and demanded, with more consideration of brevity than of grammar, "Qui?"

“Ma sœur, mon Prince.”

“Ciel ! quelle taille ; pas grande, mais quelle taille !”

With which, for him, warm encomium, Prince Carl stroked his blonde moustaches and studied her silently for five minutes. Then he asked another question :

“Pourquoi est-ce que je ne l’ai jamais vue ?”

“Parceque vous n’êtes pas arrivé à Paris, que depuis huit jours ; et parceque’elle est diablement éprisé d’un homme marié, qui est dans la Crimée, et, si c’était permis par ma mère ; elle ne voudrait pas aller dans le monde.”

The Austrian shrugged his shoulders.

“Hein ! Un homme marié ! Comme les femmes aiment les pommes défendues ! Introduisez moi, mon eher, je la ferai l’oublier.”

So Rushbrooke Molyneux introduced the Duke of Valenstein-Seidlitz to his sister, and the bold Teuton eyes fastened on Violet with delight at that belle taille, whose grace and outline eclipsed all he had ever seen. I am not sure that a casual observer would have noticed any change in our brilliant belle. The eyes had lost their riant and cloudless regard ; the soft rose hue upon her cheeks was altered to an excited flush at times, a marble pallor at others ; and the smile that had before been so spontaneous and so heartfelt, now faded off her lips the moment courtesy ceased to require it. Beyond that, there was little alteration. At her years the most bitter curse upon the mind does not always stamp itself upon the features, and though Violet never affected a gayety which her heart refused, and did not care who saw that, while Sabretashe was in danger, she shrank from all scenes of pleasure and distraction, she knew that she was pitied and that he was blamed, and that knowledge was sufficient to rouse her Irish spirit to face the world, which would only have amused itself with her sorrow and taken occasion for fresh condemnation of him,

so—she let the wolf gnaw at her vitals, but closed her soft, girlish lips with the heroism of the Spartan, and suffered no word of pain to escape them which might be construed into a reproach to him.

Vallenstein looked on her belle taille, and on her lovely face, never noticing the weary depths in the eyes that seemed “looking afar off,” and the haughty chillness of tone into which Violet, surrounded with men who would willingly have taught her to forget, had unconsciously fallen in self-defense; but thought to himself, as he drove away to a less formal and well-nigh as gorgeous an entertainment in a cabinet particulier at Véfours: “Qui le diable est ce peste d’homme marié? N’importe! Je la ferai l’oublier.” And Lady Molyneux, too, thought, as her maid unfastened her diamond tiara: “If the cards are played well, I may make Violet Duchess of Vallenstein-Seidlitz. It would be the best match of the season. His hotel here is very fine, and Madame de la Hauteville says his Viennese palace is charming. What a pity it seems Sabretasche has never had anything happen to him!—if he were not in that Crimea alive to write her letters and feed this romance, I could soon bring her to reason. However, as it is, a great deal may be done by firmness; I am glad Rushbrooke is so intimate with Vallenstein; Rushbrooke has just such views, *he* will never throw himself away for love—if I could only persuade Violet how utterly unnecessary a grande passion is—indeed, in marriage, positively inconvenient! She will outgrow her romance, of course; still it is time we put an end to it, some way or other. Her dresses mount up very expensively. I *must* have that lace—only three hundred guineas, dirt cheap! and I don’t believe the women will let me have it unless I pay part of their bill, tiresome creatures. I paid them up every farthing seven years ago, but that sort of persons grow so

rude now-a-days, instead of being thankful for one's custom, that it is utterly insufferable. I must certainly marry Violet to somebody, and I will not procrastinate about it any longer. I shall be firm with her!"

With which resolution my lady sharply bade her *femme de chambre* be quick and brush out her hair, and composed herself to her slumbers till Jeanne and the *chocolatière* and a French novel should arouse her at noon: while on the other side of the partition-wall that divided their chambers, Violet, an hour ago the belle of imperial salons, with her graceful languor, and her matchless loveliness, and her glittering court dress, lay on her couch, her long hair unbound, her pillows wet with bitter tears, pouring out all her soul in passionate prayer, and sinking at last into the slumber of exhaustion, with his letters clasped tightly in her hands, till the gleam of the morning sun, shining in through the *persiennes* on her cheeks, found the tears still wet upon them, while the lips that had so often touched his were still murmuring *Sabretasche's* name.

The Molyneux had come to winter in Paris. Corallyne, though it looked well enough in Burke, was utterly uninhabitable; London was out of the question till March, and the Viscountess, tired of traveling, and bored with the Bads, had taken a suite in a hotel in the Champs Elysées, where, between her French acquaintance and her English connections, the fashionable Chapels and the Boulevard, the Opera-Comique and the *jeunesse dorée*, the shops and her own petit soupers, she contrived to spend her days tolerably pleasantly, especially as there was a remarkably handsome Confessor of her friend Madame de la Hauteville's, who gave her unusual piquancy in her religious excitements, and made her think seriously of the duties of auricular confession. (It is commonly said that

women make the best devotees—doubtless for causes too lengthy to enter upon here—but I wonder, if religions had no priests, how many of their fairer disciples would they retain?) And now, Lady Molyneux had another object in life—to woo Prince Carl for her daughter. Bent on that purpose, she tried to make the Hôtel Clâchy very delightful to him, and succeeded. Violet paid him no attention—barely as much as courtesy dictated to a man of his rank and to her father's guest—but he cared nothing for conversation, and as long as she sat there, however haughtily silent, and he could admire her belle taille as he liked, he wished for no words, though he might have desired a few smiles. Still she was the first woman who had neglected him, and to men as courted as the Austrian that is a better spur than any, and he really grew interested when he found it not so easy “*de la faire oublier l'absent.*”

“C'est en bon train,” thought my lady; “if only Violet were more tractable, and Sabretasche would not write!”—would not *live* was in her thoughts, but naturally so religiously-minded a woman could hardly “murder with a wish,” and, having no other weapons than her natural ones of tongue and thought, planned out a series of ingenious persecutions against her daughter till she had induced her to marry either Regalia, who had followed them to Paris, or the Duke of Vallenstein. She rather preferred the latter, because the little German Court, could she transplant Violet thither, would be too far away for men to compare disadvantageously, as they did now, the *passé* with the perfect beauty. It is very inconvenient for a handsome coquette woman to have constantly beside her one twenty years younger, who waltzes better than herself, and needs no *cosmetiques*.

“My dear Violet, oblige me with a few minutes' conversation,” said my lady, one morning.

Violet looked up and followed her passively; her manner was as soft and gentle as of old—even gentler still to those about her—but the chill of her great grief was upon her, and her mother's persistence in teasing her to go into society, or to receive attentions which to Violet seemed semi-infidelity to Sabretasche, had taught her a somewhat haughty reserve quite foreign to her nature, in defense not only of herself, but of the allegiance, which she never attempted to conceal, that she gave to him as faithfully as though he had been her husband.

"My dear Violet," began the Viscountess, seating herself opposite to her daughter in her own room, "may I ask whether you absolutely intend dedicating all your days to Vivian Sabretasche? Do you really mean to devote yourself to maidenhood all your life because one man happens not to be able to marry you?"

The color rose on Violet's white brow; the sensitive wound shrank at any touch, how much more so from one coarse and unfeeling; and my Lady Molyneux, religious and gentle woman though she was, could use Belgravian Billingsgate on occasion. The blood mounted over her daughter's pale features; she answered with involuntary hauteur:

"Why do you renew that subject? You know as well as I that, unless I marry Colonel Sabretasche, I shall never marry any one. It is a subject which concerns no one but myself, and I have told you, once for all, that I hold myself as fully bound to him as if the vows we hoped to take had passed between us!"

Her voice trembled as she spoke, though her teeth were set together. Her mother was the last person upon earth to whom she could speak either of herself or of Sabretasche. The Viscountess sighed and sneered *en même temps*.

"Then do you mean that you will refuse Regalia?"

"I have refused him."

"You have!" And my lady, with a smile, drank a little eau-de-Cologne by way of refreshment after hearing such a statement. "I suppose you know, Violet, that you will have no money; that if you do not make a good match now you are young and pretty, nobody will take you when you are the dowerless passé daughter of a penniless Irish Peer? And Vollenstein-Seidlitz, may I inquire if you have refused *him*, too?"

"He has not given me the opportunity; if he do, I shall."

"If he do, you will? You must be mad—absolutely mad!" cried her mother, too horrified for expression. "Don't you know that there is not a girl in the English, or the French, or the Austrian empire, who would not take such an offer as his, and accept it with thanksgiving? The Vollenstein diamonds are something magnificent; he is a thorough Parisien in his tastes, most perfect style, and——"

"Oh yes! I could not sell myself to better advantage!"

"Sell yourself?" repeated the peeress. Fine ladies are not often fond of hearing things called by their proper names.

"Yes, sell myself," repeated Violet, bitterly, leaning against the mantle-piece, with a painful smile upon her lips. "Would you not put me up to auction, knock me down to the highest bidder? Marriage is the mart, mothers the auctioneers, and he who bids the highest wins. Women are like racers, brought up only to run for cups, and win handicaps for their owners."

"Nonsense!" said her mother, impatiently. "You have lost your senses, I think. There is no question of 'selling,' as you term it. Marriage is a social compact, of course,

where alliances suitable in position, birth, and wealth, are studied. Why should you pretend to be wiser than all the rest of the world? Most amiable and excellent women have married without thinking love a necessary ingredient. Why should you object to a good alliance if it be a marriage de convenance?"

"Because I consider a marriage de convenance the most gross of all social falsehood. You prostitute the most sacred vows and outrage the closest ties; you carry a lie to your husband's heart and home. You marry him for his money or his rank, and simulate an attachment for him that you know to be hypocrisy. You stand before God's altar with an untruth upon your lips, and either share an unhallowed barter, or deceive and trick an affection that loves and honors you. The Quadroon girl sold in the slave-market is not so utterly polluted as the woman free, educated, and enlightened, who barter herself for a 'marriage for position.'"

Something of her old passionate eloquence was roused in her, as she spoke with contempt and bitterness. Her heart was sick of the follies and conventionalities that surrounded her, so meshing her in that it needed both spirit and endurance to keep free and true amid them all. Lady Molyneux was silent for a minute, possibly in astonishment at this novel view of that usual desideratum—a marriage for position.

"My dear Violet, your views are very singular—very extraordinary. You are much too free of thought for your age. If you had listened to me once before, you would never have had the misery of your present unhappy infatuation. But *do* listen to me now, my dear—do be sensible. The eye of society is upon you; you must act with dignity; society demands it of you. You must not disgrace your family by pining after a married man. It

was very sad, I know—very sad that affair; and I dare say you were very attached to him. Everybody knows he was a most handsome, gifted, fascinating creature, though, alas! utterly worldly, utterly unprincipled. Still, even if you suffered, I think your first feeling should have been one of intense thankfulness at being preserved from the fate you might have had. Only fancy if his wife had not declared her claims before your marriage with him! Only fancy, my dear Violet, what your position in society would have been! Every one would have pitied you, of course, but not a creature could have visited you!”

The silent scorn in her daughter's eyes made her pause; she could not but read the contempt of her own doctrines in them, which Violet felt too deeply to put into words.

“I have no doubt it was a very great trial,” she continued, hurriedly; “I am not denying that, of course; still, what I mean is, that your duty, your moral duty, Violet, was, as soon as you found that Vivian Sabretasche was the husband of another, to do your very utmost to forget him, certainly not to foster and cherish his memory as persistently and willfully as you do. It is an entire twelvemonth since you parted from him, and yet, instead of trying to banish all remembrance of your unhappy engagement and breaking entirely with him, you keep up a correspondence with him—more foolish your father to allow it!—and obstinately refuse to do what any girl would be only too happy to do who had been the subject of as much gossip as you have been of late,—form a more fortunate attachment, and marry well. I tell you that your affection for Colonel Sabretasche, however legitimate its commencement, became wrong, morally wrong—a sin to be striven against with every means in your power, as soon as you learned that he was married to another woman.”

At last the Viscountess paused for breath; the scorn

which had been gathering deeper and deeper in Violet's face burst into words; she lifted her head, that her mother might not see the thick blinding tears that gathered in her eyes:

"A sin? To love *him*! with the love God himself has created in us—the noblest, best, least selfish part of all our natures! You cannot mean what you say! The sin, if you like, were indeed to forsake him and forget him; *that* were a crime, of which, if I were capable, you would indeed have reason to blush for me. When I know him noble in heart and character, worthy of every sacrifice that any woman could make him, so true and generous that he chose misery for himself rather than falsehood toward me, am I then to turn round and say to him, 'Because you cannot marry me—in other words, give me a good income, home, and social position, contribute to my own aggrandizement, and flatter my own self-love, I choose to forget all that has passed between us, to ignore all the oaths of fidelity and affection I once vowed to you, and sell whatever charms I have to some buyer free to bid a better price for them?'"

The satiric bitterness in her tone stung her mother into shame, or as faint an approach to it as she could feel, and, like most people, she covered an indefensible argument with vague irritation.

"Really, Violet, your tone is highly unbecoming toward me: if you own no obedience to a parent, you might at the least show a little respect for the opinion of a person of so much larger experience than yourself. I have absolutely no patience with your folly——"

Violet stopped her with a gesture as of physical suffering, but with a dignity in her face that awed even her mother into silence.

"Not even you shall ever apply such a term to any de-

votion I can show to him. He is worthy all the deepest love of a woman far nobler and better than I ever shall be, whose only title to such a heart as his is that I hold him dearer than my own life. I promised him my allegiance once when the world smiled upon our love; because the world now frowns instead, do you suppose that I shall withdraw it? Do not torture me any more with this cruel discussion; it is ended once for all. I shall *never* marry any other; it will always be as useless to urge me as it is useless now. God knows whether we may ever meet again; but, living or dead, I am forever bound to him."

Every vestige of color fled from her face as she spoke; her small white fingers were clasped together till her rings cut into the skin; there was an utter despair, a passionate tenderness in her voice, which might have touched into sympathy, one would have thought, even the coldest nature. But (I do not think one can blame my Lady Molyneux; if she was born without feelings, perhaps she was hardly more responsible for the non-possession of them than the idiot for the total absence of brain) her mother was not touched, not even silenced, by the sight of the suffering, which, though she checked its utterance, was only too easily read on Violet's face and in her voice.

"Is that your final decision?" she said, with a sneer. "Very well, then! I will tell Vallenstein that my daughter intends to lead a semi-conventual life, with the celibacy, but not the holy purpose, of a nun, because she is dying with love for a handsome roué who happens to be a married man. I dare say he will enjoy telling the story at the Tuileries, and there are plenty of women, my love, who will like nothing better than a laugh against *you*."

"You can say what you please," answered Violet between her teeth.

But that she was her mother, the Viscountess would have had a far sharper retort.

“Of course I can! And stories grow strangely in passing from mouth to mouth! Dear me, is it three o’clock? And I was to be at Notre-Dame by half-past, to hear that divine creature, Alexis Dupont!” And my lady floated from the room, while her daughter leant her head upon the mantle-piece, the tears she had forced back while in her mother’s presence falling hot and thick on the chill marble—not more chill than the natures that surrounded her in the gay world of which she was so weary. Her heart was sick within her, the burden of her life grew heavier than she knew how to bear.

“Vivian, Vivian, why did you leave me, why did you forsake me? Would to God that I were near you! Any fate were better than this—any fate, any fate! Would to God that I could die with you!” burst from her lips, while the form that Vollenstein coveted shook with uncontrollable sobs.

How long she stood there she did not know; her thoughts were all centered on that inexorable misery of absence, which stretched like a great gulf between those two, so formed to make each other not only happy, but tenderer, nobler, better, as two lives each incomplete without the other may well become when blended into one. How long she stood there she did not know, till hands as soft as her own touched hers, a face as fair as her own was lifted to hers, a voice whispered gently to her, “Why do you talk of dying? For you, of all, life should be bright and beautiful!” Violet lifted her head with a faint smile; she had not heard her entrance; a volume lay open by chance on a table beside her, and she pointed at the passage that was on the open page:

To feel that thirst and hunger of our soul
We cannot still, that longing, that wild impulse,
And struggle after something we have not
And cannot have; the effort to be strong,
And, like the Spartan boy, to smile and smile
While secret wounds do bleed beneath our cloaks,
All this the dead feel not--the dead alone!
Would I were with them!

"Do you not understand that, Alma?"

"Do I not!"

Alma spoke with that passionate vehemence natural to her, which, while her dark-blue eyes grew darker still, with a grief in them more sad than tears, expressed in those three little words how much of sympathy, suffering, and despair! In their long intercourse, which had been the intercourse of friends rather than that usual in their relative positions, the tenderest chord in the heart of both had never been touched; each of them would have shrank from unveiling what was most sacred and most near, and the love which they felt was never desecrated by being pulled out as public wares, and tainted by the sentimental atmosphere of "confidences."

Violet, struck by her tone, looked down at her, forgetting for the moment her own sorrow: in Alma's passionate eyes perhaps she read a history similar to her own; perhaps she guessed that Alma's association with De Vigne had not been broken without a wrench, to one of the two at least; probably she thought that he, whom she had only known satirical, and to all appearance utterly unimpressionable, had won the girl's love carelessly, and cared nothing for her in return. At least she saw enough to tell her that she was not the only one who suffered, and, moved by a sudden impulse of pity, Violet Molyneux stooped and touched with her lips the white arched brow that had once flushed beneath De Vigne's caresses.

“Alma, you are the only woman I have ever met who thought and felt as I do; tell me, what do *you* call fidelity?”

“Fidelity?” repeated Alma, with that instantaneous flash of responsive feeling on her mobile features which it had been De Vigne’s pleasure to summon up and watch at his will. “There is little of it in the world, I fancy. A marriage is to me null and void without fidelity, not only of act, but of thought, of mind, of heart; and fidelity, however wide the distance, however great the severance, makes in God’s sight a marriage tie holier than any man can forge, and one which no human laws can sever. What do I call fidelity? I think it is to keep faithful through good report and evil report, through suffering, and, if need be, through shame; it is to credit no evil of the one loved from other lips, and if told that such evil is true by his own, to blot it out as though it never had been; to keep true to him through all appearances, however against him, through silence and absence and trial; never to forsake him even by one thought, and to brave all the world to serve him; that is what seems fidelity to me,—nothing less—nothing less!”

Her eyes flashed, her lips quivered, her thoughts were with De Vigne. A tender love, an undying sorrow, were spoken on every feature of her expressive face, as, turned full to Violet, the sunlight fell upon it; showing the shadow beneath the eyes, the passion *in* them, the weary thought on her brow and lips, which love for De Vigne had stamped there.

Violet looked at her and sighed; she was too unselfish not to regret, even amid her own sorrow, that another should share a similar fate; and she felt little doubt either that De Vigne cared nothing for his former protégée, or that he had left her, with his love unspoken, but his mar-

riage told. She liked the depth of feeling and delicacy of nature which made Alma, impulsive and demonstrative as she was, hold her attachment to him too sacredly to speak of it, and hear his name, when it was occasionally mentioned in the Molyneux circle, without betraying "the secret wound beneath the cloak," loving the hand that had given that wound too well to murmur to others at its pain. The similarity of nature and of fate touched Violet. Absorbed as she was in her own bitter trial, she had liked the Little Tressillian, and felt a sensation of rest and sympathy when with her which she found with no other in the whirl of her fashionable and heartless home; but now she felt almost affection for her, the first warmth of feeling into which she had been roused since the deadly blight of severance and suffering had fallen on her brilliant life. Softer tears than those that had burned in her eyes before stood in them as she looked at her. She stooped over Alma as she sat on a low chair, her head bent, her thoughts far away, and passed her jeweled hand over the golden hair that De Vigne had drawn through his fingers, those shining silken threads that had held him closer than chains of iron.

"You are right! We must give 'nothing less.'"

Alma, for answer, threw her arms round Violet and kissed her with all the fervor which no sorrow could wholly chill out of her half Southern nature—the first warm, fond caresses which had touched Violet's lips since Sabretasche was parted from her. That was all that passed between them then or afterward on what lay nearest to the hearts of both, yet that little was enough to awake a strange sympathy between them, none the less real because it was silent. Poor little Alma! life was bitter enough to her now. Twelve months had passed; she was still as far from De Vigne as when she lay chained to her sick-bed in Reuben's cottage. The letter she had written at Montres-

sor's had miscarried; De Vigne had never had it. Hearing nothing from him, she had written again, passionately, imploringly, a letter that would have touched a heart far harder and more steeled against her than his: that shared the fate of many others that winter; many others that lay in the bottom of the harbor, or went Heaven knows where, while we were wearily waiting for them to bring something of the old familiar light from the Christmas fires at home into our cheerless tents. Undaunted, she wrote a third time. That letter she received back, sealed again, and directed to her in a writing that she knew but too well, firmly, boldly, with not a trace allowed to appear in the clear caligraphy of the passionate agony in which the words were penned. She knew *then* that he believed her false to him, that he accredited that horrible impossibility that she had forsaken him and fled with Vane Castleton; that the circumstantial evidence which had told so strongly against her had crushed out all faith and trust and tenderness in his heart toward her. It was the most cruel wound Alma had ever had, to find herself so readily doubted, so harshly given up, so unjustly denied even a hearing. "I would never have believed evil against him if all the world had sworn it to me!" she thought, her proud and high-spirited nature stung by the doubt and the injustice from him to whose full faith she knew she had so full a right. Injustice was always very bitter to her; it roused all that was dark and fiery in her character. From anybody else she would never have forgotten or pardoned it; certainly never have stooped to clear herself from it. It was the strongest proof of all of the intensity and self-oblivion of her love for De Vigne, that she forgave him even his ready suspicion of her fidelity, and thought less of her own wrong and suffering than of all she knew he endured in thinking her—his own darling, to whose lips his love caresses had

clung so passionately that warm summer night when they had last parted—false and worthless, lost to him forever.

But as I have said, Alma, with all her impulsiveness and expansiveness to De Vigne, never wore her heart on her lips; on the contrary, she was more reserved and silent on the things that were dearest and deepest to her than any one would have fancied from her frank, gay, childlike exterior. She was as sensitive as he to all touch of those more delicate mimosas that she sheltered in her heart; over them she was haughty, proud, reserved; deep feeling, whether her own or another's, was too sacred to her to be dragged out into daylight. She had, moreover, like all strong natures, great self-control and reticence. De Vigne's name was too dear to her to be breathed before others. She had resided twelve months with the Molyneux, and they never knew, though he was often mentioned casually, that his name merely spoken by another's voice sent those bitter tears to her heart which were too deeply seated to gather to her eyes.

Alma's principles of honor and of trust were far more acute and refined than those of most people; to her a tacit confidence was the same as a spoken bond; the love De Vigne had lavished on her in those few hours, when their hearts had throbbed as one, was sacred to her—a gift, a trust, a treasure reposed in her alone, not to be spread out before other eyes. It was his secret, his heart that she would have revealed, his confidence that she would have betrayed in bringing forward to others that love for him which for her own part she would have proudly and gladly avowed to all the world if needs be. Violet, the only one who would have guessed the bond there was between Alma and the Crimea, who would have translated the dilated terror of her eyes when the morning papers came in, the pallid anguish of her face when she bent over the Returns

of killed and wounded, the darker gleam of her eyes whenever De Vigne's name was mentioned by any of their set, or by some man who had come back from the Crimea from ill health or to bring dispatches, Violet was too absorbed in her own thoughts to notice what passed beside her, or at least to reflect or to muse upon it. She was pleased, as much so as the great grief that had so suddenly shadowed her life would allow her to rouse herself to be in anything, when she saw in the companion it had been her mother's fancy to procure, the Little Tressillian, the girl artist, whom she had introduced at the ball in Lowndes Square, and whom she had once blindly and laughingly envied. She was kind to her, as Violet would at any time have been to any one in a subordinate situation; still more so to one in whom she recognized a nature as proud, as delicate, as high-bred as her own, and to whom she had always had a certain attraction ever since she had heard of her as the artist of the *Louis Dix-sept*.

It was a peculiar position that Alma occupied in the Molyneux household, which was now—for some time, at the least—located in Paris. All of them, except Violet, had looked upon her as an employé and a subordinate, to be treated accordingly. The Hon. Rushbrooke, attaché to the British Legation, admiring her chevelure dorée, had thought he could make much the same love to her as to his mother's maid, whenever that soubrette chanced to be a pretty one; Lady Molyneux had scarcely ever spoken to her, save when, struck with Alma's great taste in dress, she would fain have had her turned into a sort of chef de toilette. But the Little Tressillian, conscious in herself of as good birth and breeding as any one of them, was quite able, clinging and childlike as she was in many things, to hold her own, and to make people treat her with the respect and dignity she merited by blood, by talent, by

manners, by all save money. One worthy of De Vigne's love, she thought, was certainly worthy to be treated as an equal by these people; her haughty reserve and resentment of Rushbrooke's attentions quickly sent that youth into dudgeon, and he would probably have joined the Trefusis and Vane Castleton in calling her "a little devil;" Jockey Jack vowed she was as much of a lady as any of them; swore he'd known Tressillian in early days,—by George, he *would* have them civil to the little girl, and was civil to her himself, in his bluff, blunt, kindly-meant way; even my lady was brought down to chill but decent politeness to her, by reverencing her in her secret heart for the art by which she managed to dress so prettily upon nothing; and Violet, won toward her as months passed on by that similarity and congeniality of heart and character which we had always noticed between them, was very kind to her, and gladly sought refuge in her society from the inanities, frivolities, scandals, and manœuvres constantly poured into her ears by her mother, and from the whirl of a circle whose gayeties were now so foreign to her and so repugnant; until a tacit sympathy and a sincere regard grew up between them—the friendless artiste and the fashionable belle.

PART THE TWENTY-THIRD

I.

ALL THAT FIDELITY COST.

It was Christmas night—Christmas-eve—and the midnight mass was rising and falling in its solemn chant through the long aisles of Notre-Dame. The incense floated upward to the dim vaulted roof, the starry lights glittered on the gorgeous high altar, while the sweet swell of the cathedral choir rose on the still, hushed air, as through Paris, under the winter stars, there tolled one by one the twelve strokes of the midnight hour.

Midnight mass in Notre-Dame!—it were hard to hear it bursting in its glorious harmony, its sonorous rhythm, after the dead silence of the assembled multitude, bursting at once from priest and people, choir and altar, without something of that poetry, that sadness, that veneration which lie in us, though lost and silenced in the fret and hurry of life—vague, intangible, subdued, as the last lingering notes of the Miserere.

One by one the midnight strokes tolled slowly out upon the Christmas air; hushed as though no human heart beat among them, the gathered thousands knelt in prayer; the last stroke fell and lingered on their ears, and then, over their bowed heads, the rich cadence of the choir and the full swell of the organ notes rolled their richest harmonies of praise and supplication. Among the multitude knelt Violet Molyneux and Alma Tressillian, their thoughts far from creeds or formularies, from religious differences or religious credulities, but their hearts bowed in prayer more agonized, more fervent, more passionate in its beseeching

earnestness, for those far distant that they loved so well, than any that went up to Heaven from the frail suffering humanity gathered there in the cathedral of Notre-Dame. What was to them church, place, religion? thus they prayed in the solitude of their own chambers; thus they would have prayed beside the sick-beds of Scutari; thus they now prayed in the hushed aisles of a cathedral, where, if forms differed, human hearts at least beat beside them and around, with hopes, fears, griefs, passions, trembling, quivering, pleading for mercy, as in theirs!

As they passed out of the great door to the carriage, they looked up to the still heavens, with the midnight stars shining calm and bright in the great cathedral of Nature, and in Violet's eyes stood heavy tears, wrung from her love so tender and so mournful; while Alma's, tearless and burning with the passion that only grew stronger with each hour of doubt and absence, glanced wildly up to those distant stars, which from their spheres looked down on him! Both started, as a voice whispered by their sides:

“Per Carita! date la limosina per amor del Figlio di Dio!”

They scarcely saw the beggar's face, coming out of the gas glare into the moonlit night, but they heard the voice, broken, almost fierce—perhaps with hunger!—in its supplication, and both instinctively, and contrary to the custom of either, stretched out their hands with an alms on Christmas-eve. As it chanced, Alma was the nearer to the suppliant, who caught her offered gift, but did not see Violet's. The crowd following, pushed them on; their carriage rolled away, while the woman, with Alma's coin in her hand, looked after them with a strange expression on her haggard face, partly curiosity, partly hate, partly fear, yet with a tinge of regret and pain as she muttered, in Tuscan:

“Santa Maria! questo sorriso mi fa pensare di gli! E presagio della morte—ma—per chi?”

The wild gaze of the Italian's fierce dark eyes, the haunting tone of that shrill “Carita! Carita!” still lingered in Alma's mind as she rolled through the gay gas-lighted streets of Paris, and her young eyes closed with a despairing sigh and a sickening shudder of dread, at this mysterious Human Life, which is so short in years, so long in suffering.

The Paris winter passed; passed as Paris winters ever do, with a gay whirl of glittering life for the rich, with cold, and hunger, and suffering for the poor; the gas flowers of Mabille burning at the same hour with the candle that gleamed its sickly light on the dead bodies at the Morgue. The Paris winter passed; and Violet Molyneux was still the belle of its soirées; that chill hauteur which in self-defense she had assumed, was no barrier between her and the love that was pressed upon her from all quarters and highest ranks, evident as it was, by her equable coldness to all, that unless she ever married Vivian Sabretasche that exquisite loveliness would never be given to any man. Lady Molyneux did not distress herself so pitiably at this obstinacy as she had done before, for Prince Carl was not a man to be frightened by a girl's repulse; he daily grew more entêté of that “jolie taille” which had first drawn all that Vollenstein could conceive a grande passion needed to be. He called perseveringly; he came as regularly as clock-work to their carriage in the Boulevards or the Pré Catalan; he listened without a yawn to those songs which made the Parisians sigh that Violet could not be a prima donna—from all these the Viscountess argued that, with her own good management, the hand of Vollenstein-Seidlitz would ere long be offered to Violet, and then my lady, who

did not believe in any resolution strong enough to withstand a principality and gentle coercion, flattered herself that she should give checkmate to the person of all others she most disliked—Vivian Sabretasche.

She was not mistaken. In February, Lord Molyneux received a letter with the stately royal seal of the Vallenstein-Seidlitz, requesting the honor of his daughter's hand. It came to him when they were at dinner; even with the length of the table between them, his wife knew, or thought she knew, the armorial bearings of the seal, as it lay upward unopened, and congratulated herself with a rapid cast forward as to how many hundreds the trousseau would cost; but then the trousseau would be one final expense, and Violet's dress, in the present state of things, was an annual destruction of what without her my lady would have had for her own silks and laces, jewelry and point. As they took their coffee, preparatory to their going to a ball in the Champs Elysées, at Madame de la Vieillecour's superb hotel, Jockey Jack broke the seal, perused the missive with his spectacles on, and in silence handed it to his daughter. Violet read it, with pain, for she foresaw that she should not be allowed to reject this, as she had done others, without contention and upbraiding, and gave it back to him as silently; but the thin, jeweled hand of her mother intercepted it, with a snappish sneer:

"Is your own wife, Lord Molyneux, to be excluded from all your confidences with your daughter?"

"What answer, Vy?" asked Jockey Jack, turning a deaf ear to his lady, who had a knack of bringing forward her relationship to him on any disagreeable occasion, such as opening his notes or referring her creditors to him, but on all others ignored it very completely.

"The same as usual, papa," answered Violet, bending

down to him as she rose to set her coffee-cup on a console.

Lady Molyneux read Vallenstein's formal and courtly letter with calm deliberation through her gold eye-glass; and Alma rose and left the room, guessing, with her intuitive tact and delicacy of perception, that this was some matter which they would prefer to discuss alone. Lady Molyneux read the letter, then folded it up and put it in its envelope.

"Violet, would it be too much for me to ask to be allowed to share the confidence you gave your papa just now? Might I inquire what reply you send to Vallenstein?"

Violet gave one sigh of inexpressible weariness; she was so tired of this ceaseless contention, the continual dropping of water on a stone; this jangling and upbraiding; more trying, perhaps, than more active persecution to a mind that, like hers, was infinitely above it, a temper that was singularly sweet, and tastes that revolted from the low-toned worship of position, and the utter incapability of understanding any warmer or deeper feeling, which stamped all her mother's conversation, with what was to Violet's a species of vulgarity, good ton though Helena Lady Molyneux—a Lady in her own right—might be. She lifted her eyes with that low broken sigh, forced out of her by the martyrdom of daily petty badgering and polished vituperation.

"Certainly you may, mamma. I thank Prince Carl for the honor he has done me; and I reject his offer with all the gratitude for his generosity that it merits."

Lady Molyneux shrugged her shoulders, and did not condescend to answer her. She turned to her husband, who was beating an impatient tattoo on the back of his couch.

“My dear Molyneux, do *you* intend, too, to refuse Prince Carl’s proposals?”

Jockey Jack looked up with a curse on women’s tongues and on their tomfoolery of marriage and giving in marriage; fond as he was in his way and proud of his daughter, he wished in his soul that Vy had been born red-haired, sal-low, or cross-eyed, rather than have her beauty bring these men’s bother and his wife’s perorations eternally about his ears; he would have liked to see Violet well married certainly, but if she was so exceptional as to have a distaste that way, why, the girl was young enough to wait if she chose; she would outgrow her fanciful fidelity to Sabretasche — though he was a noble fellow, certainly. He looked up, ready to dissent from his wife at a moment’s notice.

“Vallenstein does not propose for *me*, my dear. I have nothing to do with it, except to tell him, as decently as I can, that Vy is very much obliged to him, but would rather be excused.”

“Then you mean to countenance her in her folly?”

“I don’t know what you mean by countenancing her; she is old enough to judge for herself, especially about her own husband. I dare say a royal marriage would have had great attractions for you, Helena, but if your daughter thinks differently there is no reason for you to quarrel about it,” said Jockey Jack, who did not see why one man was not as good as another to Violet, nor yet if they were not why she should be bullied about it.

“I see, if you do not,” said his wife, frigidly. “No, Violet, do not leave the room, I beg; I wish to speak to you on this subject. It is of the greatest importance that she should marry soon and marry well. The singularly unfortunate circumstances that attended her lamentable engagement—an engagement that would never have been

entered into if I had been listened to—have laid her open to a great deal of remark, and to be an object of such bavardage is never beneficial to any woman——”

“Do you speak feelingly?” interrupted Lord Molyneux, *sotto voce*.

“Indeed, very prejudicial to a young girl in the outset of life,” continued his wife, imperturbably. “Violet has now been out three years; girls that were débutantes with her have settled well long ago. Beatrice Carteret, with not a tithe of her advantages, married the Duke of St. Orme in her first season; and that remarkably ordinary little Selina Albany drew Whitebait into a proposal, and he settled a hundred thousand upon her for pin-money——”

“That’ll do, that’ll do,” cut in Lord Molyneux, impatiently. “St. Orme is an old brute, who bullied his first wife into consumption, and as for Whitebait, he’s a young fool, whom his uncle tried to get shut up for idiocy; if Vy can’t do better than that, I would rather she lived and died a Molyneux. If you’ve no better arguments for marriage, Helena——”

“At all events,” said my lady, with her nastiest sneer, “they would either of them make as good husbands as your favorite would have done with a wife *in petto*! And at all events, Beatrice and Lady Whitebait have taken good positions in society—positions to be envied by all their acquaintance, and to gratify their mothers’ fondest wishes; Violet, on the contrary, as she must be perfectly aware herself, with double their beauty, talent, and attractions, has done nothing—absolutely nothing! She has been immensely admired; she has made more conquests, I have no doubt, than any woman of her years; but men will not go and recount their own rejections; other ladies will not believe me when I tell them whom she might have married—very naturally, too—and all the world knows of

her is her devotion to a married man! I leave it to her own sense to determine whether that is a very advantageous report to cling to her in circles where women dislike her as their rival, and men whom she has rejected are not very likely to be over-merciful in their terms of speaking of her. Of course it is all hushed when I draw near, but I have overheard more than one remark very detrimental to her. In a little time men will become very shy of making one their wife whose name has been so long in connection with a married man's, and whose ridiculous dévouement to Colonel Sabretasche has been the most amusing theme in salons where he has been so famous for love not quite so constant! Therefore, I say it is most important she should marry soon, and marry well; and to reject such proposals as Prince Carl's would be madness—a man who could wed, if he chose, with one of the royal houses of Europe! If you, Lord Molynieux, are so unwise, so ill-judging, as to uphold your daughter in such a course of folly, *I* shall do my best to oppose it. A letter of refusal shall never be sent to Vallenstein."

"Eh! well, I'm sure I don't know," said poor Jockey Jack, bewildered with this lengthened lecture. "Come, Vy, your mamma speaks reasonably—for once! You know I am very much attached to Sabretasche—very much—and I admit you don't see any other man so handsome or so accomplished, and all that sort of thing; and he was deuced mad about you, poor fellow! But then, you see, my dear child, as long as there's that confounded wife of his in the way, and her life's just as good as his, he can't marry you, Vy, with our devilish laws; and, ten to one, if ever the time come that he can, he won't care a straw about you—that's very much the way with us men—and you'll have wasted all your youth and your beauty for nothing, my poor pet! You see, Vy, we are not rich, and if you were

well married—it's most women's ambition, at the least! Come, Vy, what do you say?"

Violet rose and leaned against the console, with her head erect, her little pearly teeth set tight, her lips closed in a haughty, scornful curve over them, her face very pale—pale, but resolute as Eponina's or Gertrude von der Wart's—and I think the martyrdom of endurance is worse than the martyrdom of action!

"I say what I am weary of saying—that it is useless, and will ever be useless, to urge me to the sin of infidelity, which you raise into a virtue because it is expedient! Let me alone!—it is all I ask. I go into society because you desire it; it is hard that you will persecute me on the one subject which is the most painful of all to me. Let me alone!—what I may suffer, I never intrude upon you. If you wish to be free from me—if I cost you anything you grudge—only allow me to work for myself—to go into the world where, for your sake, I am not known, and, under another name, gain money for myself; I have often been told my voice would bring me more wealth than I should need. Only give me permission, I will never complain; but consent to be given over to Vollenstein, or any other man, I will not! To be sold by you to the highest bidder—to be forced into a union I should loathe—to be compelled to a lie—to worse than a lie, to perjured vows—to a marriage that would be infidelity to both! I know what you mean: an unwedded daughter is an expense, and, as society counts, somewhat a discredit. If you feel it so, I am willing to support myself; if you allowed it, I should find no shame in that; but, once for all, I *swear*, that unless God will that I should ever marry him whom I love and honor, I will be no man's wife. If you care nothing for my peace, if you will not listen to my prayers, if you will not pity me in my trial—at least, you will not seek to make me break my oath!"

With that strange calm which fixed and hopeless sorrow sometimes gives to those who bear it, Violet spoke—on her beautiful face a sighing scorn for those who would make her disloyal to him whom they once had sanctioned as her husband, mingled with that deep despair, that unspeakable tenderness which marked her love, so strong, so mournful. On her face was the stamp of that heroism, endurance, and power of sacrifice which had lain unseen in her character, and which had never been brought out in her brilliant, glittering, and happy life, till her love had called it up in all its strength. It was far above the comprehension and the sympathy of those who listened to her, as most things high and beautiful, noble and earnest, are above the understanding of the many. To how few of the thousands passing through the gas-lit streets of this city to-night do the stars above head whisper anything of their poetry, their mystery, their solemnity!

Jockey Jack rose from his seat, and left the room; the girl's face had touched him; yet he felt it was his duty to upbraid her for her folly; but he had not the heart to do it, and he felt a choking in his throat, and—true Englishman!—left the room, ashamed of the emotion which showed that all good and generous things were not wholly dead within him. And Lady Molyneux was neither touched nor softened, having little that was good and generous left in her after her intrigues, her liaisons, her cancons, her sneers at romance, her study of expediency, her forty years of dress and fashionable life, but poured out upon her daughter more cruel words—not of hot honest anger, but of cold sneering insolence, mockery, and upbraiding—than I care to repeat from the lips of a lady of the best ton and the most eminent religion.

It was difficult to wound Violet more deeply than she had already done. She listened passively;—men and wo-

men cannot, like the lama, summon death to their relief when their burden grows heavier than they can bear;—she listened passively, not deigning to reiterate her resolution, keeping down bitter responses with an effort that did her honor, solely because she knew it was her mother who spoke. When she had finished, she bent her head to her and passed out of the room; a silent rebuke which stung her mother into something touching upon shame, or rather mortification, for, though she had most words, she felt she had not victory, though she said, and meant it, that before long her daughter should wed prince Carl of Vallenstein-Seidlitz. What would be a broken oath more or less to her? Helena Lady Molyneux had broken many in her day—many besides her marriage ones! Violet found her way mechanically into the nearest chamber—the morning-room apportioned to her and Alma. Dizzy and deaf still with that pitiless avalanche of words, she threw herself on a couch—not to weep, her eyes were dry; but she laid her forehead down on the curved arm of the sofa with a low, faint cry, as if in bodily pain that had worn out all strength—even strength to complain.

At the ball at Madame de la Vieillecour's that night all beauty paled before hers; men looking on it would have given ten years of their lives to win one smile from those lovely eyes, to have made one blush glow on that pure, colorless cheek; young, unnoticed débutantes looked at her as she passed them, with that crowd gathered round her which everywhere lingered on her steps, and wished, with all the envy of women and all the fervor of their years, that they were she—the belle of Paris—that exquisite Violet Molyneux, in whose praise there was not one dissentient voice, in whom the most fastidious and hypercritical could not find a flaw. If they had seen the reverse picture, the Queen of Society without that crown

which was so weary a weight upon her aching brows—if they had seen her that night, the flowers off her luxuriant hair, the glittering jewels off her arms, kneeling there beside her bedside in solitude, which no human eyes profaned, they would have paused before they envied Violet Molyneux, courted, followed, worshiped as she was. In the world went home with most of us, I fear it would have sadder stories to tell than the cancons and the grivois tales in which its heart delights; the lips that sing our gayest barcarolles in society often have barely strength enough to murmur a broken prayer in the solitude of their lonely hours, when the mask is off and the green curtain is down.

I think it is usually those who have the deepest feeling who show it the least to those around, and uncongenial to them. The languid air, the absorbed abstraction, the careless attire, the eyes “in a fine frenzy rolling,” belong rather to that melancholy which is “only for wantonness,” that sentimentality of sorrow which displays its mourning shield with ostentation that courts observance, and lets its sorrows off in sonnets and iambics. With strong passions is usually strong self-command. No people are more passionate, or, for that matter, more demonstrative, than the Italians—yet, when they wish, no people know better how to smile while the iron is in their soul or the dagger at their throat. A school-girl, with a passing cloud on her romance-idylls, will sentimentalize by the hour together, sit apart with tearful eyes, and publish her misery and her martyrdom to the world in general, and to her own choice confidants in minute detail. A woman, whose life is wrecked by a worthless love or brutal husband, who carries a cross on her heart to which the iron-spiked cross of the devotee were rest and ease, goes out into the world with a smile upon her lips, lest her sadness seen should seem to reproach others, who, if cruel, are still dear to her. A

boy, with his first sorrow, will wander with woful visage and unkempt hair, read Werter and Locksley Hall, parade it with a certain pride and pleasure in his own melancholy, and spoil a dozen trees with cutting initials on their bark. Ten or twenty years later he hides with jealous care the curse that gnaws his life-strings—is too weary of the wear and tear of grief not to court oblivion of, rather than to nurse, his bitter cares; and, if it be some one loved and lost, through whom his life is darkened, he holds it as too sacred for the eyes of other men to spy it out shrined in the holiest of holies.

In Alma Tressillian, also, in proportion to the strength and fervor of her passion for De Vigne, were the jealousy and tenderness with which she kept the secret of that love so dear to her. There was a great deal of strength in her character; her enthusiasm, her fervent feeling, her imaginative powers, her perseverance, her affections, were not only vehement, but they were strong, deep, and lasting. Alma's was not the ordinary feminine love, warm, but too often evanescent; it was the passion of a woman of vivid brain, fervid affections, and impassioned character—with all that childlike and frank demonstrativeness natural to her youth, her truthful nature, and that candid expression of all she felt and thought, in which she had been brought up by Boughton Tressillian. If I need to tell you how bitterly she suffered during all the months she was with the Molyneux, I must have utterly failed in making you understand the character of De Vigne's last love. All her thoughts, sleeping and waking, were with him; not an hour passed but she breathed a passionate prayer to Heaven for his life and his safety; her heart grew sick, and the blood rushed in torrents to her brain with the simplest mention of the Crimea. His silence after the reception of her first letter, the return of the second in his own handwriting, had shown

her that he still disbelieved her—still doubted the love that pleaded in such burning accents to him—still held her, his own Alma, who worshiped him so singly and entirely, who for a few brief hours had nestled in his arms and listened to his vows—as the false, heartless, fickle, valueless, hateful thing, for whom no contempt could have been too great, no insult undeserved, no chastisement from his hand unmerited. Alma knew him; she knew the harsh, cold skepticism which made him so ready to believe against her, and which steeled his heart against her prayers; but though written words might fail to touch him and convince him, she felt that together, with her eyes on his, face to face, and heart to heart, he would believe her, or he should slay her at his feet; she would never let him go till he listened to her story and gave her back his love. Till she could meet him, each day, each hour, seemed a cycle of time that held her in its iron bonds and would not let her free. She had but one aim, one end—to realize money sufficient to take her to the Crimea.

For that one end Alma worked unwearyingly. Just before her illness a lady had offered her twenty guineas for a water-color of Evangeline finding Gabriel, with a pen-and-ink sketch of which she had been pleased when she visited Alma's old painting-room at St. Crucis. To finish this picture, a large one, thirty inches by fifteen, Alma had given every moment of her time since she had been with the Molyneux. She had risen early and had sat late, declining all the amusement which Violet would have given her; refusing to accompany them in their drives as often as she could, consistent with the duties Lady Molyneux expected of her, which I can assure you were not lax, and might have been almost menial but for Violet's interference and Alma's haughty refusal. Toward the summer of 55 she had finished it, sent it to the lady, who was a sister

of Leila Puffdoff's, and chanced to be in Paris at the time, and received an order for a companion-picture, the subject being left to herself. Greatly to her mother's annoyance, Violet had introduced Alma's talent into notice among the dilettanti of Paris. Many were ready to admire anything that would win them favor with the English beauty; others really saw and were struck with (as Sabretasche and the cognoscenti in general had been in London) the wonderful dash and vitality in her outlines, the delicacy and brilliance of her coloring; orders in plenty were given her, more than she could have completed in a dozen years, and Alma excluded herself from the society into which her own genius and Violet's patronage would have introduced her—society at another time so congenial to all the Little Tressillian's tastes and leanings, for she was born to shine and rule in society; and, like all conquerors, male and female, loved her scepter and her dais—that she might work, work with her art and her hands, and her rich glowing imagination. till she had money to take her to the Crimea to tell Sir Folko all—to win him back, or die. Poor little Alma! how few “win back” all that makes their life's glory, whatever stake it be; yet we live—live to the full age of human life. When we woo death, he comes not; when we bar the chamber-door, then he enters with his chill breath and stealthy step.

It was the beginning of April; the chestnuts of the Tuileries were just thrusting out their first green buds, bringing to Alma's thoughts those chestnut-boughs at her old nurse's home, under whose leafy shadows in the sunshine of two summers past she had drank so deeply of that fatal cup, whose delirium is more rapturous and whose awakening more bitter than the dreams of the opium-eater. Her hoard was completed. Never did miser gaze on his treasures, never wife on her husband's ransom, never cap-

tive on the warrant of his freedom, never author on the darlings of his brain, with fonder rapture, with more grateful tears, than Alma on the money won by her own hands, which was to bear her to him, to Granville, to Sir Folko. The thousand miles seemed now but as a span; love would cross all the lands, bridge all the seas, that parted her from him. She would go to him, she would find him; she would risk all to see him once again, to kneel at his feet, to swear to him she was his, and his alone; to force him to believe her, to wrest from him those words, so fond, so passionate, so tender, which she had heard but once, and which her whole soul thirsted to hear again, as the dying in the desert thirst for one drop from the water-brook to lave their parching throats and cool their burning brows. That he could have changed to her never crossed her mind, she loved him so faithfully herself! The strength of his passion, as it had spent itself upon her in those few short hours, had struck answering chords in her own heart; she felt how madly, how deeply this man loved her, even as she loved him; she suspected change in him no more than in herself; that he disbelieved her, that he thought, despite all she had told him, that she had fled with Vane Castleton, she *did* believe. All the hard sarcasms, all the chill skepticism that she had heard him fling at the world and at her sex made her comprehend how he might love yet still suspect her, and to wrest him back out of that sea of disbelief, to force him to look down into her eyes and there read all the truth, Alma would have braved more than a journey across those weary miles which parted her from him; and I believe that, young, delicate, susceptible in some things to terror as she was, her courage, and her spirit, and her endurance would have brought her through, no matter what danger or privation, till she had reached De Vigne.

Alma looked at her precious gold that was to take her to his side, that was to give him back to her—her lover, her idol. At last it was won—won by the head and hand for the service of the heart that was chained down, its high thoughts clogged, its beating wings fettered, its spirit bruised, but never beaten, by the curse of—want of money. It was won; the modern god without whose aid human life may struggle and fall and rise again, and again struggle and again fall, and go down at the last—quivering, trembling, dying from the unequal fight of right against might, talent against wealth, honesty against expediency, for all the world may care. It was won; and not an hour longer should any human force keep her from that distant goal whither for twenty weary moons her heart had turned so constantly. She locked her money in a secret drawer, (she—generous as the winds—had grown as careful of that treasure as any hoarding Dives!) and left her room to seek Violet Molyneux and tell her she must leave her. A warm friendship had grown up between them, not that fond and entire attachment which, girl-like, they might have felt had they met three or four years before, when their thoughts were free from care and their hearts had known no passion, but still a true affection the one for the other, arisen partly from their similarity of fate, of which neither spoke. yet both were conscious. It was impossible for Alma not to be grateful to Violet for the generous delicacy, the tact, the kindness with which she smoothed away all that her mother would have made painful in the position of any employée of hers; and Violet, with her, escaped from all the worldliness, the false-heartedness, the uncongeniality that surrounded her, and grew fond of her, as all who knew the Little Tressilian were wont to do, even despite themselves, won by her noble, liberal intellect, her passionate loving heart, her winning, impulsive, graceful “ways,”—natural to her as its

song to a bird, its vivacity to a kitten, its play in the evening wind to a flower. Involuntary and unconsciously they clung to one another—the two true hearts amid so many that were false.

She sat down in the inner drawing-room. She did not see Violet, and supposed her to be in her own boudoir, where the belle of Paris spent each day until two, denied to all, often in penning those letters, transcripts of the heart, which were Sabretasche's only solace through those long Crimean nights.

Suddenly, however, she heard Rushbrooke Molyneux's voice in the outer room; she did not like him, and he called her, like Vane Castleton, a "little devil," because when he had admired her beaux yeux bleus, and had tried to make such love to her as he thought her position in his family warranted, Alma's hauteur to him, and the keen satire with which the little lady knew how to take care of herself very well, and to hit hard where she did not admire the style of attention paid to her, had annoyed the young attaché exceedingly, and irremediably wounded his amour propre.

"Vy, am I a good shot?" he was saying.

"You know you are," answered his sister's voice; she was probably surprised at so irrelevant a question.

"Very well; then if you won't marry Vallenstein—the Dashers, you see, are coming home, and as soon as Colonel Sabretasche is in England I shall challenge him; he will meet me, and I shall shoot him here—just here, Vy—where life ceases instantaneously."

A low cry of horror burst from his sister's lips. Alma involuntarily looked into the room; she saw that Violet had started from her brother's side, her face blanched with amazement, and her eyes fastened on him with the fascina-

nion and the loathing with which a bird gazes up into a snake's green fiery eyes.

"Rushbrooke! Great Heaven! you would stain your hand with murder?"

"Murder? What an idea! Dueling is legitimate, *ma sœur*, in this country at least; and I dare say your lover will find his way to Paris, though he is such a 'man of honor.' Listen to me, Vy; seriously, you must be mad to be taking the veil, as it were, for a fellow who can't marry you—for the best of all reasons, that he is another woman's husband. It's the greatest tomfoolery one ever heard. Why shouldn't you do like any other girl—send this bosh of romance to the devil and settle well. Any woman going would be wild to have a chance of winning Vollenstein. I should say so! He's rich enough, I can tell you; and the *corbeille* he can give his bride, if he likes, will be fit for an empress. What the deuce can you object to in him? He's an out-and-out better match than we could have looked for; and he'll be a very facile-going husband, Violet; and if you have such a fancy for the Colonel, Vollenstein will be an easy enough husband after a little time, and you can invite *Sabretasche* to your court——"

The bitter, unutterable scorn stamped on his sister's face stopped him in his speech.

"God help me! if my own brother tempt me to double dishonor!"

These words broke from her almost unconsciously. She deigned no answer to him, but stood looking at him with such loathing and contempt in her lustrous eyes, such dignity on her pale features, full of the scorn she felt, that Rushbrooke Molyneux, though he was far gone in shamelessness, shrank before it.

But like many such natures, coward at heart, he could bully a woman.

“Well, young lady, will you marry my friend Prince Carl, or not?”

“I have told you once for all—*no!*”

Violet stood, her head just turned over her shoulder to him as she was about to leave the room; her calm, resolute, contemptuous tone stung him into irritation. Rushbrooke had set his heart on his sister's becoming Vallenstein's wife, for certain pecuniary reasons of his own.

“You are quite determined? Then I shoot Sabretasche dead four-and-twenty hours after I see him next. Come, Vy, choose; the wedding-ring for yourself, or the grave for your lover?”

He meant what he said—for the time at least. Violet knew that he was utterly unscrupulous; that in the Bois du Boulogne, Rushbrooke, not long ago, had mortally wounded a young fellow in one of the régimens de famille, for having unwittingly rivaled him at a bal de l'opéra with a demoiselle little worth fighting about. She knew that Rushbrooke was quite capable—if he wished to revenge himself on her for not marrying—of doing all he said, and more, if he threatened it. Her love for Sabretasche subdued her pride; in the frenzy of the moment she turned back and caught both her brother's hands:

“Rushbrooke! are you utterly merciless—utterly brutal? Not to save my own life would I condescend to kneel to you; but to save his I would stoop lower, were it possible. But never will I break my faith to him; I know that this moment he would choose murder from you rather than infidelity from me. If you take his life, you take mine; my existence is bound with his—you will scarcely brand yourself a fratricide?”

Her voice, her face, might have touched a heart of stone; but the young attaché was rather impervious to

any feeling at all, being cast much in his mother's mould. He laughed.

"Splendid acting, Vy. You always did act well, though; you played in the Belvoir theatricals when you were only ten, I remember. Come, think better of it; marry Vallenstein, and your idol is safe from me. If you boast your love is so great, you might surely save the man's life."

"God help me!" moaned Violet.

"Will you marry Prince Carl?"

"No!"

"You will 'murder' Vivian Sabretasche then, as you term it?"

Another cry burst from Violet's lips, forced out as from a woman on the rack of the Star Chamber or the Inquisition. Then she lifted her eyes to him—those lovely eyes that the Parisians compared to summer stars—with deep dark circles under them, her face full of unutterable anguish, but with a strange nobility upon it.

"I would rather leave him in God's hands than yours. He will protect him from you! I have told you I will never break my faith to him!"

"Very well! I will go and have a look at my pistols," smiled her brother, as he rose.

But Violet's courage gave way, she fell heavily forward on a couch.

"My beloved! my beloved! God knows I would give my life for yours, but torture me how they may they shall never make me false to you, Vivian. You would not wish it—you would not wish it, darling—not to save your life——"

Alma could stay no longer; with one bound, like a young panther, she was into the room and kneeling beside Violet, while she turned her beaming, flashing eyes, full of their azure fire, upon Violet's brother.

“She gave you your right title. Fratricide! You are more than that, you are a brute; and were I of your own sex I would make you feel it, boasted duelist, or rather murderer, though you be. What is your sister’s marriage to you, that you should seek to force her into a union that she loathes? Prince Carl himself would cry shame on you for seeking to win him a wife by such foul means, instead of honoring her for her love and truth—love and truth such as few men, indeed, are worthy. Go, Mr. Molyneux, go, and never come near your sister till you come to ask her pardon for your inhuman words and dastard act.”

With all her old passion, Alma spoke like a little Pytho-ness in her wrath; those dark-blue eyes flashing and gleaming upon Rushbrooke Molyneux. He, who had never seen her roused, was struck with new and far hotter admiration. That short-lived passion of hers was singularly witching to men: it had been so to De Vigne, to poor Curly, to Vane Castleton; it was, so now to Rushbrooke Molyneux. Yet she humbled him. He was mortified, conscience-stricken; every one of her words brought a flush of shame to his cheek, hardened though he was in his early youth; and he forgot that it was his mother’s dependent who spoke to him thus, whom he should have cowed with a word and threatened with dismissal. He was only conscious that it was a woman more fascinating than any he had ever seen; a woman of nobler heart, of larger mind, of stronger courage than his own, before whose anger and contempt he shrank away ashamed.

He left the room, murmuring something of Vallenstein, his friend—devotedly attached—Violet’s unfortunate attachment—only meant to frighten her, of course—nothing more—nothing more. Then he backed out, and Alma knelt beside Violet Molyneux, honoring her, loving her beyond all praise for her steadfast and unshaken love for

Sabretasche, and Violet threw her arms round her and held her close, as though clinging to some human thing in her desolation and despair. Then she lifted her face, pale, with deepened circles beneath her eyes, and a painful tremulousness on the lips, yet with something proud and stately in the midst of her anguish :

“Alma, I have not forgotten your definition of fidelity !”

The unutterably sad and tender smile with which she spoke struck to her listener’s heart; from that hour she loved Violet Molyneux with one of the few and fervent attachments of her life, and she looked up at her with an answering regard that seemed to Violet like an angel promise and prophecy for the future :

“Violet, to those who are thus faithful reward will come !”

Violet tried to smile again, but her lips quivered in the effort, and she rose and left the room, while Alma, seizing the paper that Rushbrooke had flung down, tore it apart with breathless haste, remembering young Molyneux’s words, “The Dashers are coming home.”

It was true; we were leaving at last that land of many glorious and many bitter memories, and Alma read : “The —th Q. O. Lancers are ordered home from the Crimea, and left Balaklava on the 10th, in the transport *Eurydice*. This distinguished corps has played a very prominent part in the whole campaign; the gallantry of both its officers and men has been conspicuous, and for the dash and daring they displayed at the charge of Balaklava the commander-in-chief has recommended its commanding officers, Colonel Sabretasche and Major De Vigne, to her Most Gracious Majesty, with high encomiums. The Emperor and the Sultan have already forwarded them the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor and the Order of the Medjid, which the Queen has graciously accorded them her permission to

accept. Their own countrymen will not be backward in receiving these distinguished soldiers with the honors they so fully merit and have so ably won."

How many such paragraphs we read in the journals then! Now, as a civilian told me the other day, "the Crimea is such a long time ago; nobody thinks about it!"

No, nobody!—except Curly's mother and others like her, whose hearts are with the gallant dead that lie there, and whose every hope on earth was buried under those rough mounds that are now plowed down by the share of the Russian serf.

De Vigne had been much altered since Curly's death. The hot tears that had sprung into his haughty eyes over the dead form of his old Frestonhills pet had softened the fiery passions, and in a measure thawed the ice gathered in his heart. For the first time, despite his resolute and willful skepticism, a hope had dawned upon him that Alma might yet be true to him through all the circumstances that chimed in against her. He was slow to admit it one moment, the next he clung to it madly. Absence and time had in no degree lessened or cooled the passion that had flamed up so suddenly; on the contrary, with De Vigne's temperament it grew and strengthened, and faithless, hollow-hearted, worthless though he believed Alma to be, he knew that the sight of her face, the sound of her voice, would rouse him into fiercer madness, more blind love than ever. Curly's words had let in one ray of hope, and he cursed the headlong impetuosity which had made him send her letter back unopened. There was hope, and sometimes, as I say, De Vigne strove with all his force to shut it out, lest it should break in and fool him once again; at others he clung to it as men do to the only chance that makes their life of value. Heaven knows that if his love for Alma had been error, it brought him punishment

enough. Whichever way it turned, he saw enough to madden him. If she were false to him, his life would be one long and bitter curse to him; if he had judged her too harshly, and his neglect and cruelty had driven her to desperation, and sent her, young, unprotected, attractive as she was to men, into the chill world to battle with poverty, he shuddered to think what might have been her fate—so delicate, so trusting, so easily misunderstood; if she were true to him, across the heaven that opened to him with that hope there stretched the dark memory of the woman who bore his name.

Curly had loved her, not so passionately, but more faithfully; Curly had trusted her; Curly had thought how to provide for her, and secure her from poverty, no matter how low she were fallen; while he—he had given her up, full of his own grief, his own madness—he had left her in Vane Castleton's clutches, when, if true to the trust her adopted grandfather had put in him, he would have followed her to save her from her wretched fate, though to leave her himself forever; he had believed evil of her, while Curly had rejected it, knowing no more than himself, but simply from his faith in her, and his belief in her incapability to do anything that was false or wrong. Bitterly De Vigne reproached himself for the mad haste and the cruel skepticism which had made him send her back her letter unopened. With Curly's words, "If ever a woman loved man she loved you," there uprose all the fonder, tenderer springs of that passion which he had striven to crush out, and of which there had of late only raged all the fiercer and more bitter emotions. The sweet wild hope, faint though it was, came with a rush of all that delicious happiness which he had tasted during those brief evening hours at St. Cruis, and had lately given up every hope of ever knowing again. A flood of warmer, softer,

better feelings awoke in him, in the stead of that harsh, cold, cheerless creed that despair and deception had forced upon him. At times he would persuade himself that Alma must have loved him, that all those passionate vows that her fond words, her still fonder eyes had spoken to him, could not have been lies; at others, he would madden himself with horrible thoughts of all that must have chanced if Vane Castleton had her, an unwilling victim, in his clutches; at others, he would sum up together, with that strange skill at self-torture in which human nature so excels, all the chain of circumstances that seemed to point her out as hopelessly, irrevocably false. Chained to the Crimea—for De Vigne had much of the spirit of the old Greeks and Romans, and he would have construed a soldier's duty more like Leonidas of Sparta than like some modern militaires—he yet at times longed, as an eagle chained longs for its native aerie, to go back to England and find Alma once more, no matter how, no matter where, but to decide at once the doubt that maddened him—was she what he had first thought her, or was she what he shuddered to suppose her? Curly's words had roused him strangely, they had melted much of the bitterness, the fierceness, the fiery vengeful agony that had raged in his soul since that day when he had heard that Alma had flown with Vane Castleton. His strong agony of love for her had changed as near to hate as his nature, generous and inherently forgiving, would allow. If he could have loved her less he might have hated her less, but the more time rolled on, the longer grew the weary space since he had seen that beaming and impassioned face that had wooed him so resistlessly and left him so remorselessly, the stronger, the wider, the more ungovernable grew that last love of De Vigne's. He loved her, but with the love that slew Desdemona, that would have murdered Imogene; a love

fierce, mad, touching to hate, that would have periled all for one caress of hers, but would have sent her to her grave rather than have seen a rival's hand touch her, another's lips come near her; a love inexorable as death, that must have all or nothing.

But in those long winter nights, tossing on his camp bed, Curly's words, like voices from the grave, recurred ceaselessly to him, and as a burst of tears—anguish in itself—yet relieves the still fiercer suffering of the brain before, so gentler thoughts of Alma, a ray of hope, a gleam of trust, softened and relieved the bitter despair and hopeless agony of the past months. He had been so strong in his own strength and he had fallen, surely he might have pity on those who had erred—he at least might pause before he sat in judgment on another. Was his own past so pure, his own life so perfect, that he had any right to cast a stone at a woman, even though her error and her perfidy had blasted all his life? Sabretasche—the man who had openly avowed that he had little strength against temptation, whom the world asserted, and he himself never denied, to give way to every wayward impulse, every evanescent desire—had conquered himself, had resisted the heaven to gain which he must have wooed the woman he loved to that from which when she grew older she might wish to retrace her steps; he had consigned himself to suffering perpetual rather than lead her in her early youth where, later on, she might regret and reproach him; a sacrifice the nobler because Sabretasche was *almost* certain that the love he had won would never change and never turn against him. De Vigne remembered, with a pang, how Sabretasche had said to him, “Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall,” and how he had retorted, in the pride of his unassailed strength, that to win a young girl's love, bound and fettered as he was,

would be a blackguard's act; yet his strength had gone down before his love, and he had forgotten the ties that bound him, until, had she been true to him, it would have been useless to remember them. De Vigne had not yet learned to mistrust his own power to control himself, despite the misery which his headlong infatuation for the Trefusis had brought on his own head. He had believed that he had his passions under an iron rule, because, chilled by the deception of his marriage into an intense and unrelenting skepticism of all good in the sex of that woman who termed herself his wife, and separated, moreover, from all the higher class of women by years of active service in India, mingling with and only seeking the society of men, he had never been touched into that love which had already cost him so much that he had sworn never again to be betrayed by its Judas kiss. Thus, doubly armed by his resolution never to be beguiled by woman, and by his trust in his own honor, which he had fully and firmly believed to be a shield all-sufficient between himself and Alma Tressillian, he had gone on and on till the passion he had sworn with so much scorn to keep free from, all his life through, had taken him at an unwary moment, and thrown him as a skillful wrestler may throw one who has held the belt, with strength too confident and daring too careless, in unattacked security, for many years.

As he thought and thought, lying awake with bitter memories through those long Crimean nights, De Vigne's bitter and fiery passion, half love, half hate, which, had she come before him in those moods would have crushed her in one fierce embrace and then flung her from him forever, lost much of its harshness, its bitterness, and, purged from its hatred, yearned toward her with that deep, strong love for her which he had poured out so lavishly in those few brief hours during which their hearts

had beat as one. He thought more gently, more tenderly of her, poor child! She was so young!—and if she were false, had he always been constant? and if she had deceived him, were there not errors enough in his own life to bid him not take up the stone to cast at her? Widely tolerant ever, would he be harsh alone to the woman he had loved? The thought of her face, her fair young face, with its deep-blue, upraised, earnest eyes, and its golden waves of hair like netted sunbeams, and its wide-arched brow, where intellect and truth were writ so plainly and so nobly—of her soft young voice calling him “Sir Folko!” and whispering to him those innocent yet impassioned vows of an affection at once so pure and so deep—of those hours before a thought of love came between them, gay and bright with her joyous laugh and ringing repartee, and that interchange of graver tastes and nobler studies which had had so great a charm for him,—all these rose up before him, and drove away all harsh and cruel thought of her, and his heart recoiled from the fierce and vengeful emotions which had, born in love, bordered so close on hate. All that was noble, generous, gentle, awoke in De Vigne’s character, and there was very much, mingled with those fiery passions natural to all strong natures, and that bitter scorn which in all nobler ones is aroused by injustice, deceit, and wrong. He felt a very anguish of longing to look upon her once more; he loved her now with so great a love that he could have forgiven her all wrong to him, even though that wrong laid a curse upon his life that no weight of years could lift from it, no length of time efface. He loved her, no matter what she was. And is love anything short of that?—is love true and real unless it says, “However, love, thou art fallen, *I* will not shrink from thee?”

If she had been false to him, if she had been Vane Castleton's toy for the hour and the plaything of others since, he would try to find her, save her, shield her from her fate, even though to find her so and to leave her so broke his own heart. If she had been true to him and others had chicaned her, misled her, taken advantage of her youth, her guilelessness, he would find her so; and no matter into what depths of misery she had sunk, he would raise her up, avenge her, and if ever his name became his own again, give it, with his love and honor, to her in the sight of men. Across the darker passions of his soul gleamed the Pity and the Pardon he had once had need to ask of her. His love grew gentler, nobler, tenderer; and the heart so proud, so haughty, so secure in its own honor, yet ever so frank, generous, and prompt to justice, thought, amid the anguish of those still night-watches, "Who am I to sit in judgment on her or on any other?"

The order came for us to return home. Sabretasche heard it with mingled feelings; to be free to return to the same land with Violet Molyneux, to hear of her, perchance to see that beautiful face that had risen up before him even amid the din and crash and film of impending death at Balaklava, brought with it a sudden glow of all those warmer emotions which awoke in him, not to make him rejoice like other men, but to make him suffer. Yet he would fain have stayed there, with the enforced barrier of Distance between him and the woman whom fate forbade him.

De Vigne heard it with a wild rush of hope and fear; a stifling horror of dread of all he might learn in England; a tumultuous, rapturous hope, to which he scarce dare give life, struggling for pre-eminence; the great passions of his heart striving with each other; all overshadowed with the bitter curse that his love for both these women, the two arbiters of his life, had brought him.

At once he longed and dreaded to reach England. If Alma had loved him truly, and been misled by Vane Castleton's machinations, De Vigne felt that never could he expiate the selfish and skeptic haste with which he had condemned her; and already he shuddered at the burden of the dread remorse that would pursue him should he find that, for want of a strong hand and a true heart to defend her, that delicate child had fallen into the clutches of the man whom his fellow-men, no intolerant judges either, had termed Butcher, for his brutality to the women he sacrificed and then left to poverty and death! When he thought of Castleton and Alma by the new light that had dawned on him with Curly's words, he, strong man as he was, and cold as granite as he seemed to others to have grown, could have cried aloud in his great suffering, and at the horrible phantasma of what *might have been*; as he tossed through the weary hours of the night, great drops of anguish stood upon the brow which had never paled before death or danger, and he would awake from his fevered sleep, stretching his arms out to her and calling on her name, as she had called on his. The excitement and ceaseless fatigues, dangers, and requirements of the past campaign had kept him up and carried him on, but now—a few more months of the conflict between hope and fear he knew would be more than even he had strength to bear. He would find her, living or dead; he would seek for her as Evangeline for Gabriel, even though his heart might break at the end of that Pilgrimage of Love. De Vigne at last had learnt a lesson that he had never learnt before in all his life—he had learnt to love not only *for* himself, but better than himself.

But at Constantinople—he whom all the army called by his Indian sobriquet of the Charmed Life, whom shot and shell, death and danger, had alike spared; who had ridden

unharméd out of the fatal *mêlée* before the guns of Bala-klava, though the last to leave those doomed and death-haunted lines; whom neither cold nor privation had harmed in any way; who had gone free amid the sickness that struck down his friends and soldiers by the score—at Constantinople De Vigne was chained on a sick-bed by the bitterest of all our Crimean foes—the cholera. It was touch and go with him then; his life was very nearly added to those ghastly Returns, which witnessed how much noble, gallant, manly human life was lost out there by mismanagement, red-tapeism, and procrastination. Thank God it was otherwise! the strength of his constitution pulled him through, but it had weakened him to the strength of a woman, and the Dashers sailed for England without him. I got leave to stay with him. If they had court-martialed me, they might have done. I would have been cashiered rather than leave the man I loved best on earth alone in the Scutari sick-wards in that pestilential place, that sounds so poetic and delicious with its long, lovely name, its Golden Horn, its glistening Bosphorus, its gleaming minarets, its Leilas, its Dudus, its bulbuls, and its beauty, but is, as all of us can witness, a very abomination for a sick man to dwell in, with its dirt, its fleas, its mosquitoes, its jabbering crowds chattering every lingo, its abominable little Turks, with their eternal “Bono Johnny,” and its air rife with disease, malaria, and filth.

Sabretasche would have stayed, too, with him; the similarity of fate drew him closer toward De Vigne, as it bound Violet and Alma nearer together, and he, fettered to Sylvia da’ Cerenci, felt all the warmer attachment, all the deeper pity for De Vigne fettered to the Trefusis; those two Hecates of their fate, to whom their impetuosity, their headlong, unthinking passion, their youth’s thoughtless and ill-placed love, had chained them in their older years,

when heart and mind, taste and feeling, led them to others so different.

“No, no; go to England, Sabretasche,” said De Vigne, signing the Colonel down toward him in one of his intervals of comparative ease. “Before long I hope to follow you, and you would do me much more service if you would—if you could—without bringing her name forward at all, learn something for me of——”

He stopped: he could not speak her name without a sharp spasm as of severe physical pain.

Sabretasche bent his head till his lips were close to De Vigne’s ear; it was the first time he had heard him allude to her throughout the campaign.

“Of Alma Tressillian?” he said, softly.

De Vigne signed him assent, and a silent pressure of his hand was bond enough between him and Sabretasche. If Sabretasche had been like some eminent Christians of my acquaintance, he might have taken the occasion to exalt his own superior foresight in prophesying the trouble that would be born from De Vigne’s careless intimacy with the Little Tressillian; being nothing more than a “bon camerade,” with a generous mind, a kind heart, and a gentleman’s tact, he felt no temptation to do anything of the kind.

The Dashers sailed for England. How few comparatively of the men that had left her shores returned to them! Poor Jemmy Pigott had been tumbled into a hastily-dug grave, a mass of blood, and blue and scarlet cloth, and gold lace, and human flesh, after Alma. Monckton had gone down at Balaklava, with his last sneer set on his marble features as though scoffing at death, never to soften till those features should be unrecognizable by friend or foe. Little Fan, the youngest cornet in the troop, had been left behind in that wild charge of ours; lying across his

horse, struck in two by a cannon-ball, with his sixteen years ended, and his gay boy's laugh hushed, and his girlish fair curls dabbled in Russian blood. Few enough of the men of '54 returned in '56; but what few there were, went homeward as cheerily as they had come out two years before, (they could not be more so,) save, indeed, their Colonel, whom no home awaited, whom no hope cheered, to whom no fond welcome, no tears of joy, no caresses lavished on him in breathless thanksgiving for all the dangers safely past would be allowed to him as to his fellow-men. Others went home to England with glad thoughts, fond dreams, and happy hours rising before them with the sight of those white familiar cliffs; some to a glad, thoughtless life of careless pleasure that would have gained new zest from deprivation; others to the revel and the sport, for which, biased of them before, the stern realities, and harsh but noble trials of those long Crimean winters had brought them back their boyish taste; others to the happy English home, the bridal vows, the affianced wife's caress, all the sweeter after the perils past, all the dearer because the by-gone months had been spent, not in the chase of pleasure or the rose-leaves of luxury, but in manly efforts, in noble dangers, in the struggle for life and death, in the utter absence of all the aids, the pleasures, the agréments, and the surroundings which they, from their cradle upward, had been taught to look upon as absolute necessities. One man had his racing stud; another, his yacht, the pride and darling of his heart; another, his young bride, on whose pale lips he had pressed his farewell kiss almost ere the honeymoon had passed; another, his club, his lansquenet, his life in London, all he wanted or could wish for, since they held all his desires; another, to look into some loving eyes, out of whose depths he had seen all hope fade and die by the light of the summer stars,

sole witnesses of the parting they had thought might be eternal,—all had something to look forward to and long for, save Sabretasche, who had nothing but a love that must never be blessed—a fate that bade him not only suffer himself, but see, and know, and cause the suffering of the woman so unutterably dear to him.

The Dashers left for England, and De Vigne slowly recovered; slowly, for his fevered mind retarded the more rapid steps the strength of his constitution would otherwise have enabled him to take toward more than convalescence; convalescence—that state of being which people say, and maybe they are right, is desirable and delicious when your mind is at peace, your time is of no value, soft hands tend you, and sweet voices call you back to the Silent Land; but which, to my thinking, is about as exquisite torture as can be devised, when you grudge every moment that flies away and leaves you chained down into inaction, while you are longing, as a wounded charger hears the din of the battle and longs to rise up and rush on and mingle in the fray, to have your old strength back again, and to be up and doing what an hour's delay may, for aught you know, be undoing. This is what convalescence was to De Vigne, and, par conséquence, to anything better than convalescence he was much longer traveling than he would otherwise have been. To the strong man to be laid low; for the wayward and haughty will to be powerless to rise from that sick-bed; for the fiery impatient spirit to be held down by the weary chain of physical weakness—ah! I know it is easy to talk of submission, endurance, patience; but under some circumstances philosophy, under the fetters of illness and debility, requires more strength than people dream of or allow until they feel it.

Some three weeks after Ours had got under way for

England, I was sitting by De Vigne's couch reading to him from some of the periodicals my mother had sent me. It was Hamley of the Artillery's "Lady Lee," which ought to interest anybody if a novel ever can; but I doubt if De Vigne heard a word of it. He lay in one position; his head turned away from me, his eyes fixed on the light rosy eastern clouds, his right hand clinched hard upon the bed-clothes as though it would lift him perforce from that cruel inaction, as it had aided him so many times in life. I was glad that at that minute an old Indian comrade of his—come en route from Calcutta to England viâ Constantinople to have a look at the seat of war—was shown into his room, hoping that courtesy might rouse him more than Hamley's lively story had power to do.

The man was a major in the Cavalry, (Queen's—*ça va sans dire*,) of the name of De Vine—a resemblance near enough, I dare say, to justify Mrs. Malaprop and Co. in thinking them brothers, and the Herald's Office in making them out two branches of the same house. They were no such thing, however; the De Vignes of Vigne reigning alone in their glory among the woodlands of the southern counties, with their name as clear in the records of a thousand years back as the same type of feature is in all the portraits; while the De Vines were a Northumbrian race, whose great-grandfather, having made a couple of millions by wool, managed to get a baron's coronet, and the Heralds to find him a "De" for his monosyllabic Vine, and to his own dismay could trace himself by no manner of ingenuity higher up than Henry the Eighth, in whose kitchen on dit there was a Jarvis Vine, who played the part of scullery-man in real life, but who does admirably well to figure in archives as Sir Gervase De Vine, lord in waiting on his Most Gracious Majesty.

This present De Vine—a very good fellow, though as

Granville, with his characteristic republican theory and patrician leaning, once said with a laugh, he *does* come from below the salt—sat and chatted some time of their old Scinde reminiscences of camp stories and skirmishing, and friends dead and gone that they remembered in common; heartily sorry to see De Vigne knocked down as he was, and congratulating him warmly on the honors he had won—honors for which, in truth, though De Vigne cared very little as long as he had had the delight of fighting well, and was thought to “have done his duty,” as gallant Sir Colin (*Lord Clyde* will never be so dear a title to his army) phrases it; Granville was too true a soldier to look much beyond.

At last the man rose to go, and had bidden us good-by, when he turned back:

“I say, old fellow, I’ve forgotten the chief thing I came here to tell you. This letter of yours has been voyaging after me, sent from Calcutta to Delhi, and from Delhi to Rohilcunde, and God knows where, till it came to my hand about four months ago. I was just going to open it when I saw the *g* in the name, and the ‘Crimea,’ which the donkeys at the Post-office overlooked. You see your correspondent has put you Hussars, and as I’m in the Hussars and you’re in the Lancers, I suppose that led to the mistake. It’s a lady’s writing: I hope the delay’s been no damage to your fair friend, whoever she be. I dare say you have ’em by scores from a dozen different quarters, so this one has been no loss. By George! it’s seven o’clock, and I’m to dine at the embassy. Good night, old fellow! I shall come and see you to-morrow.”

Scrawled over with the different postscripts and addresses so that nothing of the original address was visible save the “Major De Vigne,” Alma’s writing was recognized by him ere it had left the other’s hand; almost

before the door had closed he wrenched it open, and turning away from me read the many close-written and tear-blotted pages that she had penned to him on her sick-bed at Montessor's,—pages teeming with love for him deep and fervent as that he felt for her, bringing him the assurance for which he would freely have laid down his life, that she was his in heart; his as he had loved to think of her, untouched, unspoiled, unharmed by any breath of falsehood or dishonor; his own, pure, true, safe from any other man's touch; unwon by any other man's vows; loyal to him through every trial, his, the last love of his life! Knowing he would wish to read on unwitnessed, I left the room.

He did read on, and, when he had read all, he thanked God, and, bowing his haughty head upon his hands, wept like a woman, all the passion, the tenderness, the anguish of his heart pouring itself out in that fiery rain of mingling ecstasy and woe, suffering and thanksgiving unutterable. Oh! that across that golden glory of happiness unspeakable, that in that hour of rapture so pure, so perfect, that between him and the joy just won, for which his heart went up to God in such trembling, such passionate gratitude—between him and the love that was his heritage and right as man—there should be the dark shadow, that too relentless phantom of his Marriage. It is bitter, Heaven knows, to be alone in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, with darkness around, with no ray of light to guide, no gleam of hope to aid us; but even more bitter than that is it to stand as he now stood, the sudden gleam and radiance of a sunshine that he must never grasp playing even at his very feet, flooding with warmth the air around him, yet leaving him chill, and cold, and shuddering, the more because he gazed on life and light;—it is more bitter to stand as he stood, looking on the

glories of a heaven upon earth which might, which would be his if he could stretch out his hand to take it; yet to look upon it chained to a granite rock; fettered by irons that long ago his own hands had forged; held by furies, the ghosts of his own headlong follies; denied the heaven that opened to his eyes, divided from it as by a great gulf; by the fell consequences of the past; his own passions their own Nemesis.

Would you know the poison that stung him so cruelly amid the cup of love so bright, so pure, so precious? It was this single passage in that letter of fondest trust and fervent words: "She told me she was your wife, Granville!—your wife!—that coarse, loud-voiced, cruel-eyed woman! But that at the moment I hated her so bitterly for her assumption, I could have laughed in her face! I could not help telling her it was a pity she did not learn the semblance of a lady to support her in her rôle; for I hated her so much, for daring, even in pretense, to take your name—to venture to claim *you*. If it was wrong, I could not help it: I love you so dearly that I could never bear even an imaginary rival. That woman your wife! Not even when she told me, not even when she showed me some paper or other she said was a marriage certificate, (I never saw one, I cannot tell whether it was at all like what she called it,) did a thought of belief in her story—which would have been disbelief in you—cross my mind for a moment; and when I discovered Vane Castleton's cruel plot, and saw so plainly how this woman must have been an emissary of his to try and wean me from you, I was so glad that I had never been disloyal to you even with a thought. I was so thankful, my own dearest, my own Sir Folko, my only friend, my idol ever, the only one on earth whom I love and who loves me, that even with that cruel woman's falsehood in my ears, I never for an

instant credited it; I trusted you too well ever to believe that you would have kept such a secret from me. I loved you too fondly to wrong you in your absence by want of that faith which it is your right to expect and mine to give!"

Those were the fond, innocent, noble words that stung him more fiercely than any dagger's thrust, and darkened, with midnight gloom, the joy that dawned for him with the recovery of his lost treasure—joy in itself so great that it was almost pain. This was the wound which that soft and childlike hand, that would have been itself cut off rather than harm him, struck him so unconsciously, even in the very words that vowed her love and gave her back to him. This is what chained him, Tantalus-like, from the heaven so long yearned for, now so near, but near only to mock his fetters, to elude his grasp. De Vigne was wayward, impetuous; he had carried all things before his own will; he had sacrificed all things to his own desires; he had paid dearly for his passionate impulses—perhaps he had made others pay dearly too; but, whatever errors might be in his life, errors of impulse, of headlong haste, of haughty self-reliance, De Vigne was utterly incapable of betraying trust, and to put faith in him was to disarm him at one blow; where doubt would only have iced, opposition only excited him.

That Alma should trust him thus—that he must stand before her and say, "Your faith was misplaced—that woman is my wife!"—God help him! his trial was very great.

PART THE TWENTY-FOURTH.

I.

THE WIFE TO WHOM SABRETASCHE WAS BOUND.

It was April. The first chestnut-leaves of the Tuileries were silvered in the moonlight, and the dark Seine dashed onward under the gloomy bridges of the city, out under the wooded heights of fair St. Germain, where the old oaks that had listened to the love of Louise de la Vallière were thrusting out their earliest spring buds. It was a fair spring night, and the deep, calm heavens bent over Paris, as if in tenderness for the fair white city that lies in the valley of the Seine, like one of the gleaming lilies of its own exiled Bourbons. Around it, in the grand old chase of St. Cloud, in the leafy glades of St. Germain, in the deep forest aisles of Fontainebleau, among the silent terraces of Versailles and Neuilly, the spring night lay calm, still, hushed to the holy silence of the hour; in Paris, the city of intrigues, of pleasures, of blood, of laughter, of mirth, of death; of gay wit and fiery strife, of coarse brutality and exalted heroism; in Paris, the Paris of Mirabeau and André Chénier, of Rivarol and St. Just, of Marie Antoinette and Theroigne de Mirecourt; in Paris, the spring night was full of jests, and laughter, and merry chants de bivouac, while the gas-flowers of Mabilie gleamed and scintillated, and the Imperial household thronged the vacated palace of the D'Orléans, and the light-hearted crowd filled the Boulevards and the cafés; and women, with forms more lovely than their minds, were fêted in cabinets particuliers, and the music and the revelry rang

out from the Chaumière and the Château des Fleurs; and Paris was awake, crowned with flowers, with laughter on her lips and sparkling in her eyes, gay as a young girl at her first ball—gay as she has ever been, even on the eve of her darkest tragedies, her most terrible hours.

The soft spring night came down on Paris. Before the cheval-glass in her luxurious bed-chamber, with all the entourages of grace and refinement, with bright jewels on her hair, and her white cloud-like dress, and her priceless necklet of pink pearls, and her exquisite beauty, which other women envied so bitterly, stood the belle of its most aristocratic réunions—Violet Molyneux; shuddering, even while her maid clasped the bracelets on her arm for a ball at Madame de la Vieillecour's, at the memory of those cruel words from her brother's lips, which bade her choose between infidelity or death. At the window of her own room, looking up to the clear stars that seemed to gaze from their calm and holy stillness on the gay and feverish fret of the human life below, Alma Tressillian gazed on the spring night, her dark-blue eyes brilliant once again with the radiance of joy and hope; he was coming home—her lover, her idol, her worshiped "Sir Folko"—what could await her now but a return of that heaven once so rudely shivered from her grasp? Not very many yards off, in her crowded and bizarre boudoir, where finery stood the stead of taste, and over-loading passed for luxury, the Trefusis read the line in the English papers which announced the arrival of her law-termed husband's troop, and threw it with an oath to Lady Fantyre, that the Crimea had not rid her of his life, and left her mistress of the portion of his wealth that would have come to her—for the law would have recognized her rights as his "wife," and she was in difficulties and in debt. Underneath the windows, that shone bright with the wax lights of Violet's

toilette-table, stood a woman, once as beautiful as she, but now haggard, tawdry, pitiful to look upon, with the stamp of a she-devil's furious temper on her features, begging of the passers-by for the coins that would procure her the sole thing she now loved or craved—a draught of absinthe; that deadly tempter, that sure, slow, relentless murderer who, Jael-like, soothes us for the moment to drive the iron nail into our brain while we slumber, and whom, madman-like, we seek and crave and thirst for, though we know the end is death. Those four women—how unlike they were! Dissimilar as night and dawn; as fragrant, spotless roses and dark, dank, deadly nightshade; as the two spirits that in fable and apologue hover over our path, the one to lead us to a Gehenna, the other to an Eden; dissimilar enough, God knows. Yet the same stars look down on them, the same men had loved them, and, in one chain of circumstance, Fate had bound and woven them together.

That same night Sabretasche arrived in Paris. Rumors had reached him of Violet's engagement to Prince Carl of Vollenstein-Seidlitz. Believe them for an instant he did not. Though his fate had taught him that delicate and satiric sneer at men and women, at the world and its ways, which made his soft voice and polished words so keen a weapon to strike, he was by nature singularly trustful and loyal, and, where he loved, believed, nor allowed hints, or doubt, or suspicion to creep in; nothing but her own words would have made him believe Violet had changed toward him, and, with those letters of hers breathing such tender and unalterable affection, he would have refused to credit any second-hand story of her which would have thrown a shadow of doubt upon her truth.

But the rumor of her projected union with Vollenstein struck him with a sudden and deadly chill; he realized for the first time the possibility that, one day, if he could not

claim her, another might; that another man might win what fate denied to him. He knew her family was proud, and, for their station, very poor; and though he trusted Violet's truth and honor too fully to believe she would give her beauty to another while her heart was his—though he believed her to have spirit, courage, and fidelity passing that of most women—though he knew that she would never, like some women, find consolation either in a brilliant position or in calmer affections, still—still—he knew what Lady Molyneux was. He remembered women who had loved, perhaps, as fondly as Violet, who had gone to their husbands' arms with hearts aching for another; and Sabretasche, despite his faith, trembled for the treasure of which another man might rob him any moment, and he have no right or power to avenge the theft! I know he *ought* to have rejoiced if Violet had been able to have found that happiness with some other which he was unable to give her—at least, so some romancists of a certain order, who draw an ideal and immaculate human nature, would tell us, I suppose—but Sabretasche was only mortal, as I have often told you, and before we can love quite so exquisitely I fear we shall have to ostracize love altogether. He cares but little for his jewel, who sees it gleaming in his rival's crown and does not long to tear it from his hated brows and hide it in his bosom, where no other eyes, save his own, shall see its radiance.

So Sabretasche went to Paris, as soon as his troop was landed at Southampton, to learn what truth or untruth there was in this report of Violet's marriage; to look—if unseen himself—once more upon his darling, before another's right should claim the beauty once his own. He had many friends in Paris, for he had often spent his furloughs in that fair city, where life is enjoyed so gayly, and wit current in its fullest perfection; and even as he reached

the station, a man he knew—the Marquis de St. Cloud—met him, and chatted with him some minutes of the Crimea, and of their mutual friends who had fallen at Inkermann and the Tchernaya.

“One of your compatriotes is the belle of our salons just now,” began M. de St. Cloud, who, having been long absent, attached to the French embassy at Vienna, had heard nothing of Sabretasche’s brief engagement. “We are consolidating the alliance by worshiping at an English shrine, and parbleu! Violet Molyneux would excuse any folly on anybody’s part. You know her, of course, *mon cher*? She is going to be married to that fool Vollenstein, who has gone into as great ecstasies as his German phlegm will allow about her *jolie taille*. However, you will know plenty about her before you have been four-and-twenty hours here, so I need not bore you beforehand. Ah! *bon Dieu*, there is my train! I shall be back in two days. I am only going to Vivonne for a bear-hunt. *Au revoir*! I shall see plenty of you, I hope, when I return.”

Away went St. Cloud, in his carriage, and Sabretasche threw himself into a fiacre to drive to his accustomed locale, the Hôtel de Londres. The report was current, then, in Paris; and though he knew that reports are idle as the winds, based upon nothing very often, and circulating their poison without root or reason, still a sickening dread came over him; he felt as though, do what he would, a thousand mocking fates were leagued together to drag Violet from him; and he felt an imperative demand, a craving thirst to see her, to hear from her own lips whether or no she would be this man’s wife, against which he had no strength to contend. He must see her, and if she told him she could, without regret or lingering pain, wed Carl of Vollenstein, or any other, he would not curse her nor reproach her, poor child! he would have no

right to do so, and he would have loved her too well to do it if he had; but he would pray God to bless her, and then—leave her, and never look upon her face again.

It was nine o'clock—the still spring night slept softly, rocked on the boughs of the great belt of boulevard trees round Paris—when Sabretasche, alone, walked from the Hôtel de Londres to the house where the Molyneux lived in the Champs Elysées. He had stayed but a few minutes at his hotel; he had taken nothing scarcely since his chocolate at eleven; he could not rest till he had seen her again—his darling, whose fair face had been present to him in the silence of those long night-watches, only broken by the booming of the Russian cannon; whom he had longed so yearningly to see in all those weary months since he had parted from her—that terrible parting, on what should have been his marriage-day, when instead of his bridal caresses he had pressed his last kisses, his farewell to all hope, all joy on her lips, that were white with pain as she lay fainting in his arms, too dizzy with suffering to be wholly conscious of it.

His heart beat thick with a very anguish of longing as he drew near the house in which she dwelt. A carriage stood before the entrance, the door was wide open, the hall was bright with its wax-lights, the servants were moving to and fro, and in the full glare of the light, waiting for the fan she had forgotten, stood, on her father's arm, Violet—Violet, two years before his promised bride; and once more he beheld that form, that face, that with the din of war and death around had never for an hour ceased to haunt him with their surpassing loveliness. There she stood, unconscious of the eyes whose gaze she often thought would have power to recall her from the tomb; there she stood, with her white cloud-like dress, from whose gossamer folds that slight and perfect

form rose, like Aphrodite from the sea-foam; a narrow band of gold and pearls clasping her wavy chestnut hair; her large eyes darker and more brilliant still from the shadow beneath their lids; all that grace and fascination and delicate beauty about her which the Parisians merged in one word—*ravissante*; there she stood, and his brain reeled, and his heart beat with labored throbs, and he grasped the lamp-post to save himself from falling, as he looked upon the woman that he loved.

As he leaned there in the darkness, holding down with iron strength the mad impulse that rose in him to spring forward to her, nothing but the dread of shocking her too suddenly keeping him back, even in such a scene and with such spectators; Violet, taking her fan from a servant, crossed the pavement and entered the carriage, still unconscious that in the darkness of the night the life she held so dear was beating close to hers!

The carriage rolled down the Champs Elysées. Ere the door closed, Sabretasche went up to a servant, lounging against the portal to talk to a pretty *bouquetière* of his acquaintance.

“*Què va t-on ?*” he asked, rapidly.

The man — Lord Molyneux’s own man — started as he recognized Sabretasche, whom he had known so well two years before.

“*Pardon, monsieur ! Milor et miladi et mademoiselle, vont au bal masqué chez Madame de la Vieillecour. Puis-je oser dire à monsieur combien je suis bien aise de le voir arrivé en bonne santé de la Crimée ?*”

“*Merci, Alceste !*” answered Sabretasche, absently; his brain was still dizzy, his pulses were still beating loudly with the sight of that exquisite beauty that might never be his, that might soon be another’s!

“*Puis-je offrir à monsieur—— ?*” began Alceste, hesi-

tatingly, noticing the deadly whiteness of his face. The question roused him to his old refined hatred of notice or publicity, and with a hasty negative he turned, summoned a fiacre, and drove back to the Hôtel de Londres. As he had entered it first he had met Léonce de la Vieillecour, the Duc's son by an early marriage, who, always accustomed to see the Colonel come to Paris for pleasure and beaux-yeaux, had laughingly bidden him go to see his handsome belle mère at her bal masqué that night; to which Sabretasche, impatient to rid himself of Léonce, had given a hasty negative. Now he was as eager to go thither, and dressing rapidly, drove to Vieillecour's rooms in the Chaussée d'Antin, and asked him to take him with him to the Duchess's ball. Léonce gladly assented, gave him a domino and a mask, (it was a fancy of the Duchess's to have it masqué; I fancy her belle position was not so all-sufficient for her, but that she was driven to *lionneism* as a divertissement from the stately grandeur that *would* pall sometimes,) and drove him off to Gwen's palatial house in the grim court-yard, among the dead glories of the Faubourg, lighted up for one of the most brilliant and amusing réunions of the season, for all the most celebrated and beautiful women in Paris were there; and the mask gave it much of the zest, the méchanceté, and the freedom of a bal de l'opéra—a bal de l'opéra where all the revelers had pure descents and stately escutcheons, though not, perhaps, much more stainless reputations than the fair maskers of more "equivocal position," who were treading the boards and drinking the champagne of the opera festivities.

Not desirous of recognition; only waiting to watch that face so unutterably dear to him, Sabretasche persuaded Léonce to leave him, telling him he was tired, and would rather look on than join in the conversation, the intrigue, the waltz, the smooth whirl, and subdued murmur of the

society around him. Vieillecour, a man who always allowed others to please themselves, as he on every occasion made a point of pleasing himself, quitted him at his desire, and treading his own way amid the courtly crowd of glittering dresses and dark dominoes, left Sabretasche, the best-known man in Europe, the courted *lion* of both France and England, the *bel esprit* whose wit was quoted and fashion followed, whose bow was a brevet of rank to whoever received it, alone in that truest solitude, the solitude of a crowd. Had he made himself known, few there but would have made him welcome; but incognito, no one remembered him, nor looked twice at the little of his features his mask left uncovered, to recollect that they saw Vivian Sabretasche—for he had been two years out of society, and for any chance of being remembered in society, however before it may have courted us, and however we may have amused and delighted it, one might as well be lying dead among the sands of the Seine or the mud of the Thames, as have ceased to have shone in it or been of use to our *bons amis* for two long twelvemonths. *Hors de vue hors d'esprit* is the motto of the great world, which buries its greatest hero in Westminster Abbey and its greatest beauty in Père la Chaise, then fills up their places, and thinks no more of them in its ebb and its flow from the day when the dust of their tombs fell on their coffin-plates!

Sabretasche was alone in that brilliant crowd where he owned so many friends, but where heart, and eye, and thought sought for only one his love for whom had dragged him hither, to a scene so uncongenial to all his thoughts; but after well-nigh two years' absence from her, never looking on her face save in torturing memory, he would not have stayed twelve hours in voluntary absence; to breathe the same air with her, to gaze upon her loveliness, was better than that utter absence which so nearly and so

horribly resembles death that we may well shrink from it as from the absence of the grave.

He moved through the rooms, treading his way through the groups of men and women occupying themselves with the light love, the exciting intrigue, the laugh, the witticism, the badinage, which while away such hours for the beau-monde—those brilliant butterflies which toil so wearily on the treadmill of fashion; those fair women with such soft eyes and such scheming brains. He passed through them, and as yet he saw her not; though now and then he heard from men as they passed by him praises of her beauty, praises which turned his blood to fire, for how could he tell but that some of these might be his rivals, one of these be some day her husband? A man as tall as himself, in a violet domino powdered with violets in gold, passed him quickly; and Sabretasche, gentle though his nature was, could have fallen on him and slain him without shrive, for jealousy quickened his senses, and, despite his mask, he recognized Prince Carl of Vallenstein-Seidlitz, the man with whom in days gone by he had drank Johannisberg, and played écarté, and smoked Havanas under the linden-trees of his summer palace, little foreseeing that the day perhaps would come when Vallenstein would rob him of the one once promised him as his own wife.

He lost the Prince in the crowd; and still nowhere could he find Violet, whom his eyes ached with longing to gaze upon again. He caught a fragment of conversation as he passed between a faded beauty and a young fellow in a régiment de famille.

“So that English girl is really going to marry poor dear Carl! What a dexterity these English have in catching the best alliances, though they *do* forswear marriages de convenances, and cry them down with such horror.”

The young man laughed. “Ah, madame, the English-

women are like their country, they boast of a great deal which they do not carry out. Yes, *La Violette Anglaise* is going to marry poor Carl—so her brother told me, at the least, and he has good cause to make that marriage, I fancy, for he has lost, *pardieu!* I should not dare to say how much, to his future *beau frère*, and *Monsieur le Prince* is no easy creditor when his treasury is as empty as it is just now.

Sick at heart, *Sabretasche* moved on—how dare they seek to sell his darling to pay her worthless brother's debts! Yet still he trusted her too well to believe that any persuasion, coercion, or allurements, would force her into a marriage-vow that would be a lie. He loved her, therefore he trusted her, through good report and evil report. At last he found himself in the ball-room, but among its waltzers he failed to find Violet; in her stead he saw a certain *Countesse de Chevreuil*, who, many years before, had looked into his beautiful mournful eyes too long and dangerously to forget them now, and who, recognizing him with a quickening pulse, though she was a woman of the world, opened a conversation with him that she would fain have turned into the same channel as long ago. When at last she turned away from him, with a laugh that covered a sigh, to a man who would have given a good deal to win the softened tone to which the Colonel was deaf, *Léonce de la Vieillecour* dragged him perforce to see the Duchess, to speak to Madame of the Crimea and of *Curly*. She bade him welcome with that smile which no woman ever refused to give to *Sabretasche*.

Gwen Brandling and *Madame de la Vieillecour* must truly have been two different beings, that she could talk with scarce a tremor of that terrible death-scene in the hospital of *St. Paul*—talk of it flirting her fan, and glancing through her mask with those magnificent eyes, while

the dance-music rang out in her ears! Did she really think so little of her brother, of the fair child with his golden curls and his gleeful laugh, who had played with her under the shadow of the lime-trees in their old home, long, long years before, when the world and its prizes were no more to her than the polished chestnuts lying at her feet, and no prophetic shadow foretold to him his dying hour in the horrors of Sebastopol? Did she really think no more of him, as she waltzed in that brilliant circle with the arms of a royal Prince around her splendid form? Had the "belle position" she worshiped so utterly chilled all remnants of Gwen Brandling out of Madame de la Vieillecour? God knows! I will not judge her. Because there are no tears seen in our eyes, it does not follow we are dead to all grief.

The windows of the ball-room, that magnificent ball-room, equaling in size and splendor the famous Galerie de Glaces, opened at the far end on to a terrace overlooking the cool shadowy gardens behind the hotel, with their dark yews and cedars, formal alleys, and white ghost-like statues; and dropping the curtain of one of the windows behind him, Sabretasche stood a moment to calm his fevered thoughts. At the end of the terrace, having evidently quitted the ball-room as he had done by one of the twelve windows that opened on the terrace, stood a woman and a man. With all his trust in her, Sabretasche's heart beat thick with jealousy, doubt, and hate, as he saw in the clear starlight the white gleaming dress and the jeweled band upon her waving hair, which he needed not to tell him that the woman was Violet; and beside her, bending toward her, was the violet domino of Carl of Vallenstein, his mask in his hand, and on his impassive Teuton features an eagerness and a glow but very rarely wakened there.

Not for his life could Sabretasche have stirred a step

from where he stood; fascinated, basilisk-like, he gazed upon the woman he loved so madly, and the man whom the world said had robbed him of her, and would soon win from her the title by which but two years before he had hoped to have called her. He stood and gazed upon them, upon the sole thing that bound him to life, the one for whom he had suffered so much, whom he would have cherished so fondly; and upon him, the spoiler, the rival, who had stolen from him all he valued upon earth. They were speaking in French, and some of their words came to him where he stood.

“That is your last resolve?”

“Yes,” answered Violet; and at the sound of that sweet and musical voice, whose harmony had been so long silent to him, Sabretasche’s veins thrilled with that strange ecstasy of delight which borders so close on pain. “I am not ungrateful, monsieur, for the honor you would do me; but for me to accept it would be a crime in me and a treason to you. I know—I grieve to know—that others may have misled you, and not replied to you at the first as I bid them, and I sought this opportunity to tell you frankly, and once for all, that I can never be your wife.”

“Because you love another!” said Vollenstein, fiercely.

Violet drew away from him with her haughtiest grace.

“If I do, monsieur, such knowledge should surely have prevented your seeking me as you have now done. I should have thought you too proud to wish for an unwilling bride.”

“But I love you so tenderly, mademoiselle; I would win you at every risk, and if you give me your hand, I will do my best to make your heart mine too——”

Violet put out her hand with an impatient deprecatory gesture.

“It is impossible, monsieur! Do not urge me further

Leave me, I beg of you. I shall never marry. I should have hoped my friends had made you understand this; but since they misled you, there was but one open and honorable course for me to pursue—to tell you at once, myself, that, much as I thank you for the honor you would do me, I can never be your wife, nor any other's. Your words only pain me; you are too true a gentleman to press me longer. Leave me, I entreat of you, sire."

He was too true a gentleman to press her further; he bowed low, and left her; he would not honor her with another word of regret, though it cut him hard, for *he*, Carl of Vallenstein, who might have mated with almost any royal house in Europe!—to be rejected by the daughter of a poor Irish peer; and as his violet domino floated past Sabretasche, Sabretasche heard him mutter, under his blonde moustaches,—

"Que le diable emporte, ce peste d'homme marié!"

He lifted the curtain of one of the windows, and went back into the brilliantly-lighted ball-room; and Sabretasche was at last alone with the woman he loved so utterly, who stood clinching her hands convulsively together, and looking up to the spring-night stars, the moonbeams shining on her face with its anguished eyes, and the costly pearls gleaming above her brow.

"Vivian—Vivian, my husband!—I will be true to you—I will. Truer than wife ever was!"

It was a stifled, heart-broken whisper that scarcely stirred the air, but it roused a tempest in the heart of the man who heard it. With an irrepressible yearning love he stretched out his arms, murmuring her name—that name that had been on his lips in so many dreams, broken by the din of hostile cannon. Violet turned, and, with a low, faint cry of joy unutterable, sprang forward, and fell upon his heart. That meeting was sacred; unseen by any eyes

save those of the pale calm stars, which watch so much of this world's deepest grief and sweetest rapture. For a while, in the joy of réunion, they forgot all save that they were together—forgot that they met only for fate once more to tear them asunder—forgot all, save that he held her in his arms with that heart beating against his which no man as yet had had power to win from him—save that he once more was with her in this life, come back to her from danger and suffering, out of the very shadow of the valley of death, from under the very stroke of the angel of destruction.

On such a meeting we will not dwell; there is little such joy on earth, and what there is, is sacred. As, after a dream of the night in which those we have lost live again, and the days long gone by bloom once more for us with all their sunshine and their fragrance, we awake in the gray dawn of the winter's morning with all the sorrow and the burden, the darkness and the weariness, of our actual life rushing back upon us, the more dreary from the glories of the past phantasma, so they awoke from their joy to the memory that they had met only to part again—that they had had an interval of rest, given them only like the accused in the torture-room, even that they might live to suffer the more.

They must part! If it be hard to part a living member from a quivering human body, is it not harder to part and sever from each other two human hearts such as God formed to beat as one, and which are only torn asunder at the cost of every quivering nerve and every clinging fiber? Heaven knows, few enough hearts in this world beat in unison for those that do, to need be parted! Yet—they must part; and as the memory of their inexorable fate rose up before him, Sabretasche shuddered at the sight of that exquisite loveliness condemned for his sake to a soli-

tary and unblessed life, desolate as a widow without even the title and the memories of a wife. Involuntarily he drew her closer to him, involuntarily he murmured,—

“Oh, my God! Violet, we cannot live thus!”

What comfort had she to give him? None. She could only weep passionate tears, clinging to him and vowing she would be true to him always—true to him, whatever chanced.

“True to me! God bless you! But, my darling, worse than anything else to me is it to see your young bright life so sacrificed,” murmured Sabretasche, with that deep and melancholy tenderness which had always tinged his love for Violet Molyneux, even in its happiest moment—a tenderness which would have made this man whom the world, with characteristic keen-sightedness, had called a heartless libertine, give up every selfish desire, if by so doing he could have secured her happiness, even though utterly irrespective of his own. “True to me! God bless you for your noble love! And I have nothing to give you in return but suffering and tears—I have nothing to reward you with but anguish and trial! If I could but suffer for both—if I could but bear your burden with mine! I made you love me! Oh, Heaven! if I could but suffer alone——”

“No, no,” murmured Violet, vaguely; “not alone, Vivian—not alone. What we suffer, let us suffer *together*. You would not have me cease to love you?”

“My God! no. Your love is all I have in life. And yet, if I were not selfish, I should bid you forget me, and try to rejoice if you obeyed. Violet, if ever you should”—and, despite all his effort, his voice was all but inaudible with the anguish and the tenderness he tried to hold down and rein in—“if you should think at any time it were possible to find happiness with another—if you could go joy-

fully to another's heart—if you fancy you could in other loves forget my fatal passion, which would have given you every earthly joy had fate allowed me, and has been only doomed to crowd your years with suffering—if you ever think another love could make you happy, *be* happy, my darling; I will never reproach you. Do not think of what *I* shall suffer; no complaint of mine shall ever trouble you. If you are happy—whom I love better than myself—I will try and thank God that he has not through me cursed the life dearer than my own, and in time, perhaps, I may learn to bless the one who has given you the joy I would have——”

He ceased; his voice was low and broken; he could not complete his generous speech; the great love in him overpowered every other feeling; he could not bid her wed another! Who among us would ask of any man to sign his own death-warrant? Who can wonder that Sabretasche shrank from consigning himself to a living death, to an existence hopeless as the grave, with throes of mortal agony that would never cease as long as there were blood in his veins and vitality in his heart? Violet looked up in his face, the moonlight gleaming in her eyes, so full of anguish, and on her lips, on which was the smile of a love without hope, yet faithful to the end—such a smile as a woman might give from the scaffold to one whom she would fain comfort to the last.

“Do you remember, Vivian, when you first told me you loved me, I said I was yours—yours for life and death—yours forever? That vow I did not make to break; it is as sacred to me as though it were my marriage oath to you. Love, happiness, home—and with another? You can know me little, my own dearest, to speak so to me; who, loving you, could care to look upon another, could tolerate another's vows, could think of peace where *you*

were not? Others have tried to urge me to infidelity. I never thought *you* would insult me too. Noble, generous, unselfish as your love is, I, your own Violet—I, who thought once to be your wife—I will be worthy of it, and I count sorrow from your hand far dearer than joy from another's!"

Sabretasche could not answer her; he tried to thank her, he tried to bless her for her words, but his voice failed him. To have such a heart laid at his feet, and to be compelled to reward it only with suffering and trial; to have such a love as this given him, and to be forced by fate to live as though he had it not!—to leave her as though she were nothing to him, when only grown dearer by absence, to part from her was to wrench away his very life. His burden grew greater than he could bear. He shivered at her touch, at the sight of that eloquent and tender loveliness which alternately chilled his veins to ice and fanned them into fire. Violet's nobility and devotion tempted him more cruelly than her beauty. Fair faces, well-nigh as fair as hers, he had often won in the long years before, while he was a man of the world, and she a young child playing by the blue waters of Killarney; but such a love as hers, never. They might have been so happy! if in his early youth he had not wedded—in his eager trust, and generosity, and honor—a woman he had thought an angel, and who had proved a fiend. They might have been so happy! Ah, me! what words in life so mournful as that "might have been," which banishes all hope, and speaks of the heaven which had been ours if our own folly had not barred us out. "*Might have been!*" There is no heavier curse on any human life.

His burden grew heavier than he could bear. With her words dawned the ideal of so fair a life! A life with thoughts, and tastes and hopes in unison—a life such as

his poet's mind, weary of the hollowness, and satiated with the pleasures of the world, had sometimes pictured, but never hoped to find—a life of mingled poetry and passion, of every refinement alike of mind and sense—a life of love so precious, such as the fondest fancy, the wildest dream of his earliest days, his softest romance had never hoped to win. It dawned before his eyes, it rose up before his grasp with all its sweetest glories. The world—the world—what was that to them? he had but to stretch out his hand and say to the woman who loved him, “Come!” and both might go to a life beautiful as a summer's dream, where love alone would be their world—a world sufficient to them both, for here he dreaded no inconstancy from her, and here he feared no satiety for himself.

His burden grew heavier than he could bear. He grew more deathly pale; great tearless sobs heaved his chest. His head was drooped till his lips rested on her hair; he stood immovable, save for the fast thick throbs of his heart, and the convulsive strength with which he pressed her against his breast. The physical conflicts he had of late passed through were peace, rest, child's play, compared with this deadly struggle that waited for him the first hour of his return!

Suddenly he lifted his head.

“I have no strength for this! Let us go into the world. I must put some shield between us and this torture.”

He spoke rapidly, almost harshly; it was the first time that his voice had ever lost its softness, his manner the tenderness natural to him at all times, and doubly gentle ever to her. She lifted her eyes to his with one heavy, hopeless sigh, and Sabretasche, as he heard it, shivered from head to foot. He dared no longer be with her alone,

and—he led her back into the crowded ball-room. There were many masks worn that night at that *bal masqué* of the Duchess de la Vieillecour's!

"I wish I were Violet Molyneux," thought a young girl, who, plain and unattractive, was brought to all such scenes to sit unnoticed and spiritless. God knows, brilliant belle though Violet was, there was little enough to be envied in her lot. They who did envy her, little guessed how her heart echoed the last words Sabretasche had murmured in her ear.

"Would to Heaven we could die together, rather than live apart thus!"

Violet left immediately; she told her father she felt unwell and wanted rest. It was true enough! Sabretasche had quitted the house at once; he could not be with her before the eyes of others, and, standing on the *pavé*, he watched her as he had watched her in the *Champs Elysées*, going to her carriage, with all her high-bred and delicate beauty—that beauty that must never be his.

He reproached himself for having given her the torture of the past hour. He knew she, like him, would buy their meeting at any price of suffering, but he felt the cost was too great for her to bear. She endured anguish enough in their mutual doom; and such conflicts as these would wear out her young life. Such tempests of the heart as they had passed through that night do the work of years upon those who endure them. Tender and gentle as he was ever over her, thinking of her trial before his own, ever willing to spare her before himself, Sabretasche—who felt as if he could never make reparation to her for having drawn down on her head the curse of his own fate, though he had done so all unconsciously and unwittingly, in ignorance of the chain that dragged upon him—at any cost to

himself would, had he been able, have spared her, were it but an iota of the weight of grief which love for him had brought on her young head. He loved Violet Molyneux with such love as is but very rarely seen among men or women !

He walked along under the silent April stars, heedless of where he turned his steps, unconscious to everything in that brilliant capital, where he had often shone, the gayest and most witty in its fashionable coteries, the most careless and most dazzling in its many revels ; unconscious he, its once reckless and courted lion, of all but the weary burden which it was his greatest grief that he could not bear *alone*. He walked along under the calm April skies, the air around him sweet with the fragrance of the dawning spring, careless of the groups that jostled him on the trottoir, from the gay students, chanting their chansons à boire, to the piteous outcasts whose last home would be the Morgue ; from the light-hearted, bright-eyed grisette of the Quartier Latin, to the wretched chiffonnier of the Faubourg d'Enfer, stopping to carry rags and filth away as wealth. He walked along, blind to the holy beauty of the midnight stars, deaf to the noisy laughter of the midnight revelers. He walked along, till a shrill voice struck on his ear, the voice of a woman, "*Limosina per la carità, signór !*"

The language of his childhood, of his youth, of his only cloudless days, of his poet's fancies, penned in its silvery rhythm under the fair skies of Italy, with all a boy's romance and all a boy's fond hope, while hope and romance were still in the world for him, always stirred a chord of tenderness and regret in his heart. For his fondest endearments Italian words rose to his lips, and in his hours of strongest passion Italian was the language in which he would first and most naturally have spoken. Despite the

chain that Italy had hung upon him, he loved her and he loved her language with one of the deep and mournful attachments with which we love what has cost us heavily, and which is yet dear to us. From his musing, that shrill voice, with its "Carità, carità, signór!" startled him with a sudden shock. Perhaps something in the tones stung him with a vague pang of remembrance, a pang as of an old wound suddenly struck in the dark by an unseen hand. At any rate, involuntarily, for the sake of the Italian words, he stretched out his hand with the alms she begged.

The face was haggard, faded, stamped with the violence of a fiendish temper, inflamed with the passion for drink; the eyes red, the lips thin, the brow contracted, the hair gray and spare—the face of a virago, the face of a drunkard. Still, with an electric thrill of memory, it took him back to another face, twenty years younger, with delicate coloring, smooth brow, coral lips, long shining hair, and dark voluptuous eyes—another, yet the same, marked and ruined even then with the stain of the same virago passions.

He gazed upon her, that dim and horrible memory struggling into birth by the light of the gas-lamp; her bloodshot eyes looked up at him; and *thus*, after twenty years, Sabretasche and his faithless wife met once again in life.

He gazed upon her as men in ancient days gazed on the horrible visage of the Medusa, fascinated with a spell that, while they loathed it, held them tight bound there, to look till their eyes grew dim and their hearts sick unto death on what they dreaded and abhorred; fascinated, he gazed upon her, the woman who had betrayed him; fascinated, she gazed on him, the husband she had wronged. They recognized each other; the tie that had once bound them, the wrong that had once parted them, would have taught them to know each other, though twice twenty years had parted

them; he who had wedded and loved her, she who had wedded and dishonored him.

There they stood, in the midnight streets of Paris, face to face, once more. They, husband and wife! They, those whom God had joined together! Oh! farce and folly and falsehood! There they stood together. The man, with his refined and delicate features, his noble bearing, his gentle and knightly heart, his generous and chivalric nature, his highly-cultured intellect, his fastidious and artistic tastes, his proud, poetic susceptibilities, so sensitive to dishonor, so incapable of a base thought or a mean act; and *she*—the beauty she had once owned distorted with the vile temper and ravings of a shrew; in face and form, mind and feeling, the stamp of an unprincipled life, a vulgar bias, a virago's passions, of a conscience dead, of a heart without honor, of a brain besotted with the drink to which she had latterly flown as consoler and companion; a creature from whom a passer-by would shrink with loathing of the evil gleaming in her eyes; the type of that lowest, most debased, most loathsome womanhood, ruined by the worst of passions, drink; from whom, if such reeled out before him from a gin palace, or passed him on the pavé, he shrank with the disgust of his fastidious taste, and the compassionate pity of his gentle and generous nature.

Yet these were husband and wife. Church and law bound them together, and would have thought it sin to part them!

She looked up in his face—up into those melancholy and lustrous eyes, which seemed to her the eyes of an avenging angel, for the last time that they had gazed upon her he had flung her from him in self-defense—a murderess in her mad and vengeful temper, in her dire hatred of him for coming between her and the love that wronged him—the

man so young, so fond—the husband who had borne with her so unwearyingly, trusted her so generously, who should have won, if ever man had a right to win, loyalty and tenderness in return.

With a stern severity foreign to his nature, Sabretasche gazed upon her. All his wrongs, all the memories of that betrayal of which he had no *proof* to give to the world, but which had stung and eaten into his very soul—all the torture which his tie to this woman had brought on his head and on hers who was dearer than his life—all the joys of which this wife, so false to him, had robbed him—all the happiness which she, traitress to him, denied him, with that title which law gave her, but which nature refused—all the horror, the bitterness, the misery of his bondage to this woman, and the separation from the one who so truly loved him—all rushed upon him, with a tide of fierce and cruel memories, at the sight of the wife to whom fate condemned him. His face grew yet paler and stern, with an iron bitterness rare with him. Wronged pride, outraged trust, violated honor, grief, loathing, scorn, pity, an unspoken accusation, which was more full of reproach and rebuke than any violent words, were written on his face as, sick unto death, he turned involuntarily from her—deeply as she had wronged him, she was sunk too low for him to upbraid. With a shudder he turned from her; but—with an inarticulate cry and a gurgle in her throat, she fell down on the flagstone of the street. Confused, and but half-conscious from the draught with which she had drugged her thoughts and satisfied the passion which had grown upon her, as the passion for drink grows ever on its victims, strongly imbued with the superstition of her country, while vague and stray remnants of the miracles, the credulities, and the legends of her religion still dwelt in her mind too deep for any crime, or any deadened

conscience, to uproot her belief in them,—the pale stern face of her husband, with those dark, melancholy, reproachful eyes that gazed upon her with a voiceless rebuke that touched even her into remorse for the lengthened wrong her life had done him, seemed, as he stood suddenly before her in the faint, cold light of the moon, as the face of an avenging angel beckoning her to the chastisement of her crimes; as the face of an accusing spirit come from the land of death to summon her to follow him. Debilitated and semi-conscious, her strength eaten and burnt away by the deadly potency of absinthe, her mind hazy and clouded, more impressionable at such times than at any other to the superstitions of her creed and country; struck with terror at what her weak mind fancied was a messenger of retribution from the heaven she alternately reviled, blasphemed, and dreaded; with a shrill cry of horror and appeal, she fell down at Sabretasche's feet a helpless, moveless mass, lying still, death-like, huddled together in the cold, clear moonlight, on the glistening pavement, before the man her life had wronged.

Sabretasche's impulse was to leave her there; to fly forever from the spectacle of the woman he had once loved so fondly, and who had once slept innocently on his heart, who was thus lost and thus degraded; to leave forever the sight of a wife who outraged every sense, every delicate taste, every noble feeling, but to whom the law still bound him, because from a drunkard no divorce is granted! That was his impulse; but pity, duty, humanity stayed it. Though she was his enemy, she was a woman; though she had wronged him, she was now in want; though she had forsaken, betrayed, and robbed him of more than twenty long years' peace and joy, she had *once* been his love. He had once vowed to cherish and protect her, and though, Heaven knows, she had long ago lost all right or power to

appeal to those vows, or that care, he would not leave her there, alone in the Paris streets at midnight, lying in the kennel like a dog. A crowd gathered round them in an instant—round the man with his patrician's grace and beauty, and the woman lying at his feet, squalid and repulsive—all the more loathsome, for the shadow of past loveliness that remained, showing all that nature would have left so fair, but for the vile human passions that had ruined and destroyed it. Among the crowd was a young medical student from the Quartier Latin, on his way from the Bouffes, who stooped down to look at her as she lay, and then raised his eyes to Sabretasche.

“Monsieur ! regardez comme elle saigne !”

A dark crimson stream was welling from her lips out on to the pavement, white and glistening in the moonlight. With a sickening shudder Sabretasche turned away. He had seen the horrors of the Great Redan ; he had looked on suffering and bloodshed with that calmness and tranquillity of nerve which soldiers learn perforce ; but a sudden faintness seized him at the sight of that life-stream which, perchance, bore with it the last throbs of an existence which was the curse of his own. The street faded from his view, the voices of men grew confused in his ear, the gray moonlight seemed to whirl round and round him in a dizzy haze, out of which glared and laughed in mocking horror, the face of a fiend—the face of his wife. His brain lost all consciousness ; life seemed slipping from his grasp ; he saw nothing, he heard nothing, he was conscious of nothing, save that horrible loathsome face close to his, with its wild bloodshot eyes dragging him with her down, down, down—away from life—into a vague hell of horror.

The soft night wind fanning his brow awoke him from his swoon ; the voices around him seemed to bring with them a glad rush of free, healthful, welcome life ; the ter

rible phantom of his brain faded away in the clear light of the moon, and in its stead came the memory of Violet's sweet, fair face. The truth rushed on him with the questions of the medical student as to his own health, the young fellow having noticed the sudden stagger with which he reeled back, and the deadly pallor of his face, and he answered the glance with which Sabretasche asked the question his lips refused to put into words.

"They have taken that poor woman, monsieur, to the Café Euphrosyne, to see what's the matter with her before she goes to the hospital. My friend Lafitolle is with her."

Sabretasche thanked him for his care, and asked him to show him the Café Euphrosyne. He longed to leave the place, to go where he could run no risk of hearing, seeing, coming again in contact with the terrible phantom of the night—the phantom that was no spirit-form moulded by the fancies of his brain and dissolved in the clear and sunny light of morning, but a dark and hopeless reality from which there was no awakening. But he knew by her prayer, "*Carità! carità!*" that she must be in want, poverty-stricken, and probably, now that he could make no more money from her claims on Sabretasche, deserted by her brother; and the heart of Sabretasche was too generous, too gentle, too full of knightly and chivalric feeling, to leave her, without aid, to suffer, perhaps to die, homeless and destitute, in the hospital of a foreign city.

The Café Euphrosyne was a rather low and not over-cleanly house in the by-street into which Sabretasche unconsciously had wandered, chiefly frequented by the small shopkeepers of the quartier; but the people of the house were good-hearted, good-natured, cheerful people—a man and his wife, with whom the world went very well in their own small part of it, and who, unlike the generality of people with whom the world goes well, were very ready

and willing to aid, if they could, any with whom it went ill. Their café was open, and lighted; Gringoire Virelois—the young épiciier over the way—was giving a supper after the Cirque Olympique to his fiancée, Rose Dodu, and her friends, and in an inner room the good mistress of the house was venting pitiful exclamations and voluble compassion on the poor woman whom her bon ami, the water-carrier, had lifted on his broad Auvergnat shoulders and borne into her café, at the instance of M. Lafitolle, a medical student.

There, on a table, lay the once beautiful Tuscan, surrounded with a crowd—the many curious, the few compassionate—the life-blood still dropping slowly from between her thin ashy lips, her bloodshot eyes closed, her haggard cheeks more hollow still from their leaden hue, the hair that he remembered so golden and luxuriant now thin and spare, and streaked with gray, far more so than her years warranted. As Sabretasche drew near the door of the chamber a murmur ran among the people that the English milord knew something of her, and on the strength of it Lafitolle came forward to Sabretasche.

“Pardon, monsieur, but may I ask if you know anything of this poor woman, of her family, of where she comes from? If not, she shall go to the hospital.”

The flush of pain and of pride that passed over Sabretasche’s face, and then passed away, leaving it pallid as any statuary, did not escape the young student’s quick eyes.

“No,” he answered, quickly. “Do not send her to the hospital. Let her remain here; I will defray the expenses.”

He took out his purse as he spoke, and at the sight of the glittering gold within it, and the sum he tendered her out of it, Madame Riollette, though as little mercenary as a

woman can be who lives by the money she makes, thought what an admirable thing it is to fall in by fate with an English milord, and immediately acquiesced in his wish for her to receive the stranger, and listened with the humblest respect while he bade her do all that was necessary, and send for some surgeon, whom the young student recommended as the nearest and the cleverest.

Sabretasche waited there, leaning against the door of the café, the night wind blowing on his fevered forehead, a thousand conflicting thoughts and feelings at war within him, till the surgeon who had been brought thither came down the stairs and out of the door. As he passed him, Sabretasche arrested him.

“Monsieur, allow me to ask. Is she—will she——”

He paused; not to save his life could he have framed the question to ask if hers were in jeopardy; hers, dark with the wrong of twenty years' wrong to him; hers, so long the curse upon his own; hers, the sole bar between himself and Violet.

“Will she live?” guessed the surgeon. “No, not likely. She has poisoned herself with absinthe, poor devil! I suppose you found her on the pavement, monsieur? It is very generous to assist her so liberally. Shocking thing that absinthe—shocking! Bonsoir, monsieur.”

The surgeon, without awaiting a reply to any of his questions, went off, impatient to return to the écarté he had left to attend his summons to the Café Euphrosyne, and Sabretasche still leaned against the door-post in the still, clear starlight, while the soft, fresh rush of the night wind, and the noisy revelry from Rose Dodu's betrothal supper, alike passed by him unheeded.

His heart throbbed, his pulses beat rapid time, his brain whirled with the tide of emotions that rushed through him. For twenty years he had not seen his wife; he had left her

that day when he had flung her from him, in self-defense, as he would have flung a tigress clinging to him with its cruel griffes, a young and beautiful woman, with the rounded form, the delicate outline, the luxuriant hair, the rich coloring of youth. As such he had always thought of her. In absence we seldom give account for the ravages of time; and this haggard, wild-eyed woman, with her whitening hair, her thin lips, her hollow cheeks, her remnant of by-gone loveliness, only just sufficient to render more distinct the marks and ruinous touch of years and bad passions, and that deadly love of stimulants which stamps itself so surely on its victims, seemed to him like some hideous caricature or phantom, rather than the real presence of his wife. For twenty years his eyes had not rested on her, and the change which time had wrought, and temper and drink hastened, shocked him, as a young child, laughing at his own gay, fair face in a mirror, would start, if in its stead he suddenly saw the worn and withered features he should wear in his old age. This sudden resurrection of the memories of his youth; this sudden meeting with the wife so long unseen; this abrupt transition from the delicate, fresh, and exquisite loveliness of Violet Molyneux, to the worn, haggard, repulsive face of the woman who barred him from her,—took a strange hold upon him, and struck him with a strange shock; such as I have felt coming out of the warm, bright, voluptuous sunshine of a summer's day into the silent, damp, midnight gloom of a cavern. And side by side with that face, seen in the glare of the gaslight, with that harsh voice and that shrill cry for alms, "*Carità! carità!*" and those wild, bloodshot eyes lifted to his, rose the memory of the one so young, so fair, with its beautiful open brow, and its earnest, impassioned eyes, and its soft lips white with pain, and the clinging clasp of those fond hands, and the quiver in that low and tender voice

speaking those noble words, "I count sorrow from your hand dearer than joy from any other." Side by side they rose before him, and with a wild thrill of such delirium as they might know who, on the scaffold, putting up their last prayer to God, and taking their last look of the golden sunlight and the laughing earth, see the pardon which beckons them to life among their fellow-men from the very border of the grave, there came rushing through his heart and brain the thought of *freedom*—the freedom that would come with Death!—to banish it he would have needed to be Deity, not man.

He leaned there against the door, his thoughts mingling in strange chaos death and life; at once going back to the buried past of his youth and on to the possible future of his manhood, when Rose Dodu and her party, brushing past him with their light French jests, going homeward after their merry supper, roused him back into the actual moment, and ere the house closed for the night he turned and sought Madame Riollette, to bid her have all that might be necessary for the comfort and the care of her charge, and wait for no solace that money could bring to soothe the dreary passage to the grave of the woman whose life had blasted his. Church people, I know, looked on Sabretasche as an *âme damnée* and a lost spirit—as a child of wrath, ungodly, worldly, given over to dissipation and skepticism and self-indulgence—yet, if I had wronged him, or were in need, I would rather have his reading of charity and forgiveness than that of "eminent Christians," though theirs is "doctrinal and by grace," and his the simple offspring of a noble heart, a generous nature, and a tolerant mind, which, knowing much evil in itself, forbore to avenge much evil in others.

Madame Riollette listened to his injunctions with the reverence with which gleaming Napoleons are sure to gain

for their owner all the world over, and promised to give the sufferer every care and comfort—a promise she would have kept without any bribe, for she was full of the ready and vivacious kindness of her country, and was one of the best-natured little women that ever breathed.

“Monsieur would not like to speak to the poor woman?” she asked, hesitatingly.

“No, no,” said Sabretasche, hastily, with that flush of pain which every thought of his wife brought with it.

“But, monsieur,” went on Madame Riollette, submissively, with her little head, with its white cap and its ponderous earrings, hung bashfully down, afraid of seeming rude to this English milord, in whom she, with French intuition, discerned that ring of “aristocrat,” which she, true in heart to the white lilies, revered and adored—“if monsieur could speak Italian it would be such a kindness to the poor woman. No one in the house could, and since she had become conscious, she kept murmuring Italian words, and seemed so wretched no one could understand them. As monsieur had been already so nobly benevolent to her, if monsieur would not mind adding so greatly to his goodness——”

And Madame Riollette paused, awed to silence by the pallor and the set sternness in Sabretasche’s face. She thought he was angry with her for her audacity, and began a trembling apology. Poor woman! his thoughts were far enough away from her. A struggle rose within him; he had an unconquerable loathing and shrinking from ever looking again upon the face of the woman who had wronged him; yet—a strange mournful sort of pity awoke in him as he heard of her muttering words in their mutual language in foreign ears upon her death-bed, and he thought of her young, lovely, as he had first seen her

among the pale-green olives of Montepulito, almost as young, almost as lovely as Violet Molyneux.

He stood still some moments, his face turned from the inquisitorial light of Madame Riolette's hand-lamp; then he lifted his head:

"Lead the way."

She led the way up a narrow staircase and along a little corridor, and opened for him a door through which Sabretasche had to bend his head to pass, and ushered him into a chamber—small, it is true, but with all the prettinesses and comforts Madame Riolette had been able to gather into it, and neither close nor hot, but full of the sweet evening air that had come in blowing far from the olive-groves of the sufferer's native Tuscany, across the purple Alps and the blue mountains of Auvergne, over the deep woods, and stretching meadows, and rushing rivers of the interior, till it came fresh and fragrant, laden with life and perfume, bearing healing on its wings to the heated, feverish, crowded streets of Paris.

Sabretasche took the lamp from the woman's hand and signed her to retire, a hint which Madame Riolette interpreted by seating herself by the little table in the window and taking out her knitting, pondering, acute Parisienne that she was, on what possible connection there could be between the poor, haggard, wretched-looking woman on her bed, and the graceful, aristocratic milord Anglais.

By the light of the lamp in his hand, Sabretasche stood and gazed upon his wife, as she lay unconscious of his gaze, with her eyes closed, and scarcely a pulsation to be seen that could mark life from death. He looked upon her face, with the stamp of vicious and virago passion marked on every line, on the bony, nervous hand that had been raised, in their last parting, against his life; the hand which bore on its finger the key that had locked the fetters

of marriage round and about him with such pitiless force, the badge of a life-long bondage, the seal that stamped the death-warrant of his liberty and peace, the wedding-ring that in the joyous glow and blind fond trust of youth he had placed there, with his heart beating high, with all a lover's tenderest thoughts, the sign as he then believed of life-long joy and union with a woman who loved him as well and as truly as he loved her. He thought of his bride as she had looked to him on his marriage morning in Tuscany, fair as woman could ever need to be, with the orange-flowers and myrtles gathered with the dews of dawn glittering upon them, wreathed among her rich and golden hair; he looked upon her now, with the work of twenty years stamped upon her face, twenty years of wrong, of evil, of debasing thought, of avaricious passions, who had lived on the money of the husband she had wronged, to spend it in the lowest of all vices, the love of drink. He knew nothing of how those twenty years had been passed, but he could divine nearly enough, seeing the wreck and ruin they had wrought. And he was tied to this woman!—if she rose from that bed of sickness, he was bound to her by law! His heart recoiled with horror and sickened at the thought; reason, and sense, and nature revolted, outraged and indignant at the hideous truth. He longed to call the world that condemned him to such bondage around him where he stood, and ask them how they dared to fetter him to such a wife, to such a tie; chaining him to more horrible companionship than those inflicted who chained the living body to the festering corpse, never to be unloosed till welcome death released the prisoner consigned to such horror unspeakable by his own kind, by his own fellow-men.

As he gazed upon her, the light of the lamp falling on her eyes, aroused her from the semi-conscious trance into

which she had fallen, weakened by the loss of blood, which, though not great, had taken away the little strength and power which she had, all vitality and health having been eaten gradually up by the poison she had loved and courted—poison slow, but ever sure.

Her eyes unclosed and fastened on him with a wild, vacant stare; then she covered her face with her hands, and cowered down among the bed-clothes in mortal terror, muttering trembling and disjointed words:

“Oh, Santa Maria! have mercy, have mercy! I have erred, I have sinned, I confess it! Send him away, send him away; he will kill me with his calm, sad eyes, they pierce into my soul. I was mad—I hated him—I knew not what I did. Oh, Mother of God, call him away! I am ready, I will come to the lowest hell if you will, so that I may not see him. His eyes, his eyes. Holy Jesus, call him away!”

Her voice rose in a faint, shrill shriek; the phantasma of her brain was torture to her, and in its unconsciousness the superstitious terrors of her childhood's faith rose clear and strong as when long years ago she had trembled, little more than an infant, to see the (to her) mysterious Host lifted above the crowd. She cowered down among the clothes, trembling and terror-stricken, before the gaze of the man she had betrayed, who, to her wandering brain, seemed like an avenging angel to carry her to an eternal abode among the damned.

“Poor soul, poor soul!” murmured Madame Riollette to her knitting-needles, “that's how she's been going on for the last hour. I wish the milord Anglais would let me send for the Père Lavoisier. If anybody can give rest to a weary sinner it is he.”

Sick at heart with the scene, and filled with a mournful pity for the wreck he saw before him, Sabretasche tried to

calm her with some Italian words of reassurance and compassion; but the sound of her native language seemed only to excite her more wildly still. She glared at him; her dark eyes, bloodshot and opened wide, recalling to him their last parting, when they had glittered upon him as now, but then with the fire of a tigress and the hatred of a murderess. She sprang up with a convulsive movement and signed him frantically from her.

“Go away, go away! I know you; you are Vivian, my husband; you are come from hell to fetch me. I have sinned against you, and I would sin again. I hate you—I *hate* you! Go to your English love! but you can never marry her—you can never marry her. I am your wife. All the world will tell you so, and I will not let you kill me. I will live—I will live, to curse you as I have——”

She sank back on her pillows, her little strength exhausted with the violence of her passions; her eyes still glaring, but half consciously, on him—quivering, panting, foaming at the mouth like a wild animal after a combat; there was little of humanity, nothing of womanhood, left in her—and—this woman was his *wife*!

She lay on the bed, her wild eyes fixed on him, breathing loud and quickly, defiant, though powerless, like a wounded tigress, stricken down in her strength, but with the fell ferocious instinct still alive within her. Then she began again to shrink, and tremble, and cower before her own thoughts; and hiding her face in her hands, began to weep, murmuring some Latin words of the Church prayers, and calling on the Virgin’s aid.

“I have sinned—I have sinned; oh, Madre di Dio, save me! Fili Redemptor mundi Deus, misere nobis. What are the words—what are the words; will no one say them? I used to know them so well. I can remember nothing; perhaps I am dying—dying, unconfessed and unabsolved

Where is Padre Cyrillo? he would give me absolution. Let me confess, let me confess, O Santa Maria, before I die!"

Now that the one thought of confession and absolution had come into her mind, she never let it go; moaning that one prayer to the Virgin, she lay less violent and less excited, but weeping piteously, and begging for a priest; a priest, poor soul! with that strange belief which Catholics and Protestants alike share, if not in the ability of another mortal to shrive their sins, in his power to help them rub out the dark scores of a long life at the last minute, when, frightened by the death that is drawing near, they exaggerate their sins, and yet catch at the feeblest straw to save them from them. Weary of the scene whose horrors he had no power to soften, heart-sick of the human degradation before him, Sabretasche turned to Madame Riollette:

"Is there no priest you could summon?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur," answered that good little Catholic, warmly. "There is the Père Lavoisier, the curé of Sainte Cécile, and so good a man! He will rise any hour, and go through any weather, to bring a ray of comfort to any soul; and he can speak her language, too, for he is half Italian."

"Send for him," said Sabretasche, briefly, "and show me to another room. You shall be well paid for all your trouble. I knew your patient in other days; I intend to remain here till the surgeon's next visit."

He spoke more briefly and hurriedly than was his wont; but Madame Riollette did not heed it. She would have been only too glad to have him always there, provided he paid as he had done that night, and ushered him with many apologies into the room which had lately witnessed Rose Dodu's fête des fiançailles. The scent of the air, reeking

with stale wine and the odors of the late supper, struck on Sabretasche's delicate senses, so used to refinement and luxury that no campaigning could dull or blunt them; and throwing open one of the small casements, he sat down by the open window, leaning out into the cool, silent street, over whose high-pointed roofs the gray dawn was growing lighter, and the morning stars larger. He felt a strange, irresistible fascination to stay there till he knew whether this life would revive to be again a curse to his, or whether the icy hand of death would unloose the fetters man refused to sever. Yet they were horrible hours—hours of fear and longing, of dread which seemed so hideously near akin to murder; of wild, delirious hope, which for his life he could not have chilled; horrible hours to him, in which he waited to know whether with another's death existence would bloom anew for him, and from another's grave the flowers of hope spring up in all their glories.

He had bade Madame Riollette, when she had brought him some café au lait and brandy—for he had taken nothing for many hours—to let him know when the surgeon had paid his next visit, and awaiting the medical man's opinion, he sat by the open window, while the soft April dawn grew clearer and brighter, and the sparrows began to twitter on the house-tops, and the hum of human life to awake in Paris. He sat there, for what seemed to him an eternity, his nerves strung to tension, till every slight sound in the street below him—the taking down of the shop shutters, the cry of the water-carriers, the bark of the dogs—jarred upon his brain, and every minute passed heavily away as though it were a cycle of time. His heart beat fast and thick as a knock came on the panels of the door, and it was with difficulty he could steady his voice to give the permission to enter. He expected to see the surgeon; instead, he saw the curé of

Sainte Cécile, a mild, silver-haired, gentle-voiced old man, of whom all Madame Riollette's praise was true.

"May I speak to monsieur?"

"Certainly, *mon père*," answered Sabretasche, to whom, from his long years' residence in Italy, the title came naturally.

"You know the sufferer to whom I was called?"

Sabretasche bent his head; evasion of the truth never at any moment occurred to him.

"You are her husband?"

The blood rushed over his face; he, the haughty gentleman, the refined patrician, shrank as from the insult of a blow from the abrupt question that told him that his connection with the woman who dishonored his name, who cursed his career, who blotted his escutcheon, and had now sunk so low that an honest day-laborer might have shrunk from acknowledging her as his wife, was no longer a secret, but known so widely that a stranger might unhesitatingly tax him with it.

"By whose authority do you put these questions to me?" he asked, with that careless hauteur which had made the boldest man among his acquaintance pause before he provoked Vivian Sabretasche.

"By no authority, *monsieur*," replied the priest, mildly, "except that which commands me to do what I think right without regard to its consequences to me. Under the seal of confession I have heard the sufferer's story; the one her life has sinned against is her husband; him she saw this night standing by her bedside; him she will never now rest without seeing, to ask his pardon. When Madame Riollette told me of your benevolence to the poor woman who had been found dying in the street, I thought you must be he whom she implores Heaven to bring to her that she may sue for his forgiveness before the grave closes over her——"

“Is she dying?” His voice was hoarse and inarticulate as he asked the brief question.

“Fast; when another night closes in—nay, most likely when noon is here, she will have ceased to live.”

Sabretasche turned to the window and leaned his forehead on his arm; the blood rushed like lightning through his veins, his breathing was quick and loud, like a man who, having borne a weary burden through a long day of heat and toil, flings it suddenly aside, and his lips moved with a single word, too low to stir the air, but full of inexpressible tenderness and thanksgiving—the one word, “*Violet!*” Alone he would have bowed his face upon his hands and wept like a woman, but in the presence of another he turned with that calm and equable gravity which, until he had last loved, nothing had had power to disturb. The traces of deep and strong emotions were on his face, but he spoke as tranquilly as of old.

“You have guessed rightly; I am her husband by law, though I myself for twenty years have never held, nor would ever hold, myself as bound in any way by moral right to her. She has forfeited all claim or title to call me by such a name. Since you have heard her story—if she have told it you as truthfully as those of your creed profess to tell everything in their confession—you can judge that an interview between one who has caused, and another who has suffered from, twenty years of wrong, could be productive of peace to neither. I have cared for her, finding her suddenly ill in these streets; I have sent for medical aid; I have given Madame Riollette, I now give you, full power to do everything that wealth can do to soothe and soften her last moments; beyond that, I do not recognize her as my wife, and I refuse to see again a woman who, when I left her, would have sought my life, and who, even now, drove me away from her with curses.”

He spoke calmly, in his low, sweet voice, but there was a set sternness on his face; compassion had made him act gently to his wife, but it had not banished the haughty and bitter wrath which wronged pride and outraged trust had ever awakened at her memory or her name.

"But, monsieur," interrupted the old curé, gently, "if your wrongs are great, death will soon expiate them; if her errors to you are many, she will be soon judged by a God more merciful, we must all for our own sakes hope, than Man is ever to his fellows. I have just administered the last offices to her. I should scarcely have done that had she been still hardened and impenitent. She repents; can any of us do more than that, monsieur? And have not all, even the very best, much of which we *must* repent if we have any conscience left? It is hardly fitting for us to sit in judgment on any other, when in ourselves we have much evil unexamined and unannealed, and if there were no outer checks, but constant opportunity and temptation, crime enough in the purest of us to make earth a hell. Your wife repents, monsieur. She has something to confess to you, without which she cannot die in peace, not even in such peace as she may yet win, poor soul! A word from you will calm her, will give her the only comfort she can ever have this side the grave. You have very much to pardon; but oh, monsieur, when you lie on your own death-bed you will thank God if you have conquered yourself and not been harsh to her on hers."

They were simple words. The curé of Sainte Cécile had never had much eloquence, and had been chosen for a crowded parish where kind words and good deeds were more wanted and better understood than rounded periods and glowing tropes. They were simple words, but they touched the heart of his auditor, awaking all that was gentle, noble, and tolerant in his nature. It was true.

What was he, that he should judge?—what his life, that he had title to condemn another? It was the creed that he had ever held in that fashionable world, where men and women sin themselves, and redeem their errors by raking up scandal and preaching moral sermons upon others, and seek to hide the holes in their own garments by hooting after another's rags; it had ever been his creed that toleration and not severity was the duty of humanity, and he had sneered with his most subtle wit at those who from the pulpit or the forum rebuked the sins they in themselves covered with their surplices or their robes. Should he turn apostate from his creed now, when it called him to act up to it? Should he dare to be harsh to this woman, simply because it happened to be against himself that her errors had been committed? He wavered a moment, then—his sense of clemency and justice conquered..

“You are right. I have no title to judge her. I will see her, if you think it best.”

And the priest, as he looked up into his face, with its pale and delicate beauty, and its earnest and melancholy eyes, thought “what a noble heart this woman has wronged and thrown away.”

PART THE TWENTY-FIFTH.

I.

RELEASE.

ALONE, Sabretasche once again mounted the narrow staircase—alone, he entered the bed-chamber, and signed to Madame Riollette to leave him there—alone, by the gray faint light of the dawn, he drew near the death-bed of his wife, and stood silently beside her. The opiate the surgeon had given her in his second visit had soothed and calmed her; all the wildness and ferocity of her eyes had gone, but the hand of death lay heavily upon her. She looked up once at him as he stood there, then covered her face with her hands and wept, not loudly or passionately, but long and unrestrainedly, like a child after a great terror.

“I hear that you wished to see me,” said Sabretasche, in that low, sweet, melodious tongue in which, long ago, among the orange-trees and olive groves of Tuscany, he had vowed his love-words to her.

She answered him not, but, still hiding her face in her hands, wept with low and piteous sobs; then she lifted her eyes to his with a shrinking shame, and suffering, and terror, that touched him to the core.

“I have wronged you—I have hated you—I have cursed you—I have stood between you and your happiness for twenty weary years,” she moaned. “You can never forgive me—never—never; it were too much to hope! Yet I wanted to see you once before I die; I wanted to tell you all. Even though your last words be a curse upon

me, I should have no right to complain I have deserved it."

"You need not fear my curse," answered Sabretasche, slowly and with effort, as though speech were painful. "If I cannot say I forgive, I am not likely to insult you in your suffering with useless recrimination. We have been separated for twenty years; I am willing not to evoke the wrongs and dishonor of the past, but to part in such peace as memory will allow."

He spoke gently, but with an involuntary sternness and a deep melancholy, so deep that it was an unconscious reproach, which struck with a keener pang into the heart of the woman who had wronged him than violent words or fierce upbraiding. She clinched her hands convulsively:

"Do not speak so gently, for God's sake, or you will kill me! I would rather hear you curse, rebuke, reproach, upbraid me; anything rather than those low, soft tones. I have wronged you, hated you, lied to you; robbed you, betrayed you, dishonored you; to speak so gently to me is to heap coals of fire on my head. I repent—I repent, God knows; but, at the eleventh hour, what value is my remorse? For twenty years I have wronged you; what good is it for me to tell you I repent when I am dying, and can harm you no longer if I would?"

Sabretasche was silent; her voice, her gestures, her words struck open his wounds afresh. He felt afresh the cruel, bitter sting of his betrayal; he thought of Violet, of all he had suffered, of all he had made her suffer, and his hatred for the woman who had stood so long between them flamed up in all its strength. He might have pardoned his own wrongs, but the sufferings of the one beloved by him—never!

His wife glanced upward at his averted face, and shivered at the dark look it wore:

"Madre di Dio! you will never forgive me?"

He was silent. Again she repeated her passionate wailing prayer:

"Madre di Dio! you will never forgive me?"

He glanced at her with a shudder, and a weary sickening sigh from his heart's depths:

"*I cannot!*"

The words roused the devil in her, which the curé had thought those vain "last offices" had exorcised; the stern passion gleamed again in her eyes, and she sprang up like a dying panther:

"No! because you love your English mistress. Would to Heaven I could live and keep you from her!"

"Silence!" broke in Sabretasche, so sternly that she started and trembled as she heard him. "Never dare to pollute *her* name with your lips! I came at your request, but not to be reproached or questioned. Your own conscience must accuse you of the wrong you did me long years ago, when I both loved and trusted you. For more than twenty years you were content to live upon the gold of the husband you had betrayed. For more than twenty years you, who had won from me as fond, and true, and long-suffering affection as a man could give a woman, have been a clog upon my life, a stain upon my name, a festering wound in my side, a bar from all peace, all light-heartedness, all happiness; and yet because I could not *prove*, you would not even make the only reparation left in your power—acknowledgment of the wrong that you knew had parted us."

"But I acknowledge it *now*. I repent it *now*, Vivian. No one can do more than that!"

To the lips of the man of the world rose naturally the satire which was habitual. Yes! she confessed and repented now that life was ebbing from her grasp, revenge

no longer possible, and acknowledgment unneeded, as people who have played their last card out on earth turn frightened, with weakened nerve, to God, insulting Him and flattering their priests with "death-bed repentances!" and timorous recantations, which they would have laughed at in their day of better health and stronger brain! But he was too generous and too merciful to utter the sneer which rose involuntarily to his lips to a woman helpless and dying, who, however bitterly she had betrayed him, was now powerless to harm. He sighed again, heavily; the wretched state of the woman he had once loved struck him with keen pain; her suffering, her poverty, her degradation touched the man of refinement and luxury, from whom every jar and chill of the discomfort of a different world to his own had ever been sedulously excluded, and he could not look on the utter wreck of what he had last seen, perfect in youth and beauty, without deep pity, in which his own hate was quenched, his own wrong avenged. He answered her more gently, and very sadly:

"I did not come here to reproach you. Your conscience must know the wrong you did me, and my own life has not been pure enough to give me any title to fling a stone at you."

Well said! Libertine, skeptic, egotist, man of pleasure and of fashion, as society called Sabretasche, he could act up, even here with his most cruel enemy, to his doctrine of toleration. It is more than most do who preach louder and with more "orthodoxy!" But Sabretasche did not pretend to be a saint; he was simply a man of honor. She looked at him long and wonderingly: to the fierce, inconstant, and vindictive Tuscan, this justice simply for the sake of justice, this toleration, given to her *against* his impulse, merely because he considered it her due, was new and very strange.

"You humble me bitterly," she said, between her teeth. "But I have sinned; it is right punishment. I *did* wrong you. I wedded you because I was sick of being caged in Montepulto, and because I thought you, as you were, rich, generous, and of high birth. I never loved you; and when I was alone with you, your attentions teased and irritated me, and the solitude you seemed to think so like Paradise sickened and annoyed me, till I succeeded in making it a Hell. I cared nothing for anything you cared for; your love of refinement was a constant restraint upon me; your poetry of thought and feeling a constant annoyance to me. I grew to hate you, because you were too high, too delicate in thought, too much of a gentleman for me; your superiority jarred upon me and irritated me. I hated you for it. I hated you even for your affection, your gentleness, your generosity, your sweet temper, which were so many silent rebukes to me. I hated you still more when I loved Fulberto Lani."

As she spoke her lover's name, dark loathing and bitter contempt gathered over Sabretasche's face; he thought of Lani—coarse, illiterate, low-born, low-bred, as he remembered him—and felt, fresh as though dealt him but yesterday, the sting of his wife's infidelity with a rival so utterly beneath him.

"I hated you," went on the Tuscan, rapidly, with the fictitious excited force given her from the opiate; "and when, that morning, you surprised him with me, and taxed me with my love for him, I would not confess to it, for I knew the confession would set you free, and since you had once chained me to you I swore you should rue the fetters with which we had loaded each other. You left me. Well you might! a woman who had betrayed your love, and would have murdered you in her fury and her hatred

Not long after, Lani left me too; he had only been fooling me; he was an idle, worthless, inconstant do-nothing, the lover of half the women in Naples, caring for and faithful to none. Gran' Dio! how I hated *him*! But no matter!—that is passed, and the rest you know. You know how, yearly, my brother threatened you with exposure of your marriage, and extorted from you the money on which we lived? That lasted for near twenty years. Pepe was extravagant; I lived in such gayety and such excitement as Italy could give me, and I sank lower and lower every day. I should have disgraced you, indeed, if our connection had been declared to your aristocratic English friends! I—a drunkard—*your* wife! Then we heard—for Pepe ever kept a careful watch over you—that you loved a young English girl; loved her more than you had done other women; loved her so that you would fain have married her.”

She was touching on dangerous chords if she wanted his forgiveness; his face grew dark, his soft sad eyes stern, and he turned involuntarily from her and walked a few paces toward the window.

“When we heard that you were in love with her—Pepe soon learnt it; it was the talk of London—and that you were going to the south of France, Pepe, unknown to you, followed, and laid in your way the Neapolitan journal with the death of my aunt Silvia; he knew it was so worded that you would believe I was dead, would deem yourself free, and would marry again where you loved. He guessed rightly; you engaged yourself to the English signorina; then Pepe persuaded me to go to England; then, as you know, thinking to get from you a heavy bribe for silence, which would keep him in comfort all his life, he went to you to offer, if you married your young English love, never to betray your connection with us, provided we

were paid enough. You refused. We could not understand your scruples. The signorina would never have known that her marriage was illegal, or that another was really your wife. You refused, and we were beggared. I had no money to go to law against you to make you provide for me, as Pepe had threatened. We could bribe you no longer, and you went to the war in the East. My brother left me to shift for myself as I might; he cared nothing for me when he could no longer make money by my name, and I was very poor—how poor *you* cannot think, reared as you have been in luxury and wealth. I have sunk lower and lower, till you have found me a beggar in the streets of Paris. I have done you cruel wrong. I have given you hate for love, betrayal for trust. I have robbed you of money for twenty years; I have stood between you and your happiness, and gloried in the curse I was to you. I have done you cruel wrong——”

She stopped, panting for breath, exhausted with the effort of speaking so long; and Sabretasche stood looking out of the window at the dawn, as it rose clearer and brighter in the fair morning skies. It had been, indeed, God knows, a cruel wrong—a wrong that had stretched over more than twenty years—a wrong that had stolen all peace and joy, not only from him, but from one far dearer than himself.

“Come here. Come nearer,” said his wife, in faint and hollow tones, as the temporary strength that her cordial had given her faded away.

His face was still white and sternly set as he turned unwillingly.

“Look at me!” she moaned, piteously, lifting to his the drawn, thin, sallow face, from which every trace of beauty had long departed, and as he looked he shuddered.

"Now can you curse me? Can you not feel that life has fully avenged you?"

He was silent; if life had avenged his wrongs on her, he felt that it had cursed him for no sin, chastised him for no error, since to this woman, at least, he had given affection, trust, and good faith, and had been rewarded by infidelity, ingratitude, and hate!

"Say something to me, Vivian," she moaned, in pitiful despair—"say something gentler to me. If you knew what it is to die with the curse of one we have injured on our heads. The past is so horrible, the future so dark! Oh, God! how hard it is to live only to die thus! Do not send me down into my grave with your curse upon me, to pursue me through eternity, to hunt me into hell!"

"Hush!" said Sabretasche, his low soft tones falling with a "peace be still!" on the storm of remorse and misery before him. "Hush! *I* do not curse you—God forbid—I tell you my own life is not pure enough for me to have any right to condemn you. If I cannot say truthfully that I forgive you—at least I will do my best to think as gently of you as I can, and to forget the past. I cannot promise more."

She caught his hands in hers; she wept, she thanked, she blessed him with all the excitable vehemence of her national character. Weakened by suffering, terrified by death, she seemed to cling to but one thought, one hope—the forgiveness of the man whose love she had wronged from the hour she had stood with him at the marriage altar; that fatal marriage altar, so often the funeral pyre for all man's hopes, and peace, and liberty; where, as by the priests of old, living human souls are offered up in cruel holocausts to a fanatic folly!

"I have but one thing more to tell you—I must hasten before my strength fails me," she began, raising herself

upon the pillows—"I want to speak to you, Vivian, of my child—your child——"

"The child of such a mother!—I can hear nothing upon that head."

"Santa Maria! why?"

His slight sarcastic smile curved his lips for a moment:

"Why? Dare you ask? How can I tell that she was mine? And even if you assert she is, what sort of woman must she be, reared and educated by you and Guiseppe da Castrone? You try my patience and my forbearance too far. I come here at your desire, I forgive you my own wrongs; but do more—be connected again with the past curse of my life, recognize in the slightest way any one of the brood that conspired to stain my name, to rob me of my peace, and to bribe me to a lie;—give my name or my countenance to one bred up under the tutelage of those who, shameless themselves, first taught me the sting of betrayal in my youth, and afterward tempted me in my manhood to dishonor—once for all, I tell you, woman, that *I will not!*"

He spoke with more impatient anger and stern passion than were often roused in his gentle and indolent nature. She had presumed too far on his forbearance! to try and farm on him a daughter of hers, probably Lani's child, or, if his own, one whose education and mode of life must have made her low, common, unprincipled, uncultured, such as he would blush for, such as he would loathe;—to be asked to give to such a one his name—the name that Violet Molyneux would take;—roused all that was haughtiest and darkest in his nature. She had gone too far, and to this he would neither listen nor accede. The very thought was hateful, abhorrent, loathsome!

"She *was* your child," the Tuscan repeated eagerly—"I swear it, and I should hardly perjure myself on my death-

oed—she was your child! God knows whether she is living now or not; I cannot have harmed her, for I have not seen her even since she was two years old. I put her out to nurse as soon as she was born, in a village near Naples, with a peasant-woman, who grew very fond of her. Six months after her birth, as you must remember, you and I parted, never to meet again till to-night in the streets of a foreign city!—we parted; and when the child was two years old her foster-mother brought her to me; she was going far away—I forget where—Calabria, I think, and she could keep her with her no longer. She was very lovely, poor little thing, but she reminded me of you.”

“Silence!” broke in Sabretasche, passionately. To have any link of the hated chain of the past cling about him still; to have any one of this loathsome Tuscan brood forced on him now, when death was nigh to relieve him from the shame that had festered into his soul so long, stung him beyond endurance. The child of such a mother!—what had he for her but hatred? “Silence! I will not hear her name. I will have none of her; if she press her claim on me I will refuse to acknowledge her. Whether or no she be daughter of mine, I disown her forever, she is dead to me forever. Great God! is the madness of my boyhood never to cease from pursuing me?”

The dying woman raised herself on her bed with eager, trustful haste to speak while yet her brain could serve her, while yet her lips could move:

“But you must hear me—you must! I cannot die in peace unless I tell you—she was your child!”

“My child or not—she was *yours*, and I disown her; my life shall not be shamed by her, my name shall not be polluted by her.”

‘But hear me——’

"I *will not*. If she be mine, I will acknowledge no daughter of yours. You have dishonored me enough; my future at least shall be free from you."

"But hear her story—hear her story! You need never see her, never know her, but let me confess all to you—let me die in peace," wailed the wretched woman, piteously. "She was your child. Before her birth I never sinned to you; I would not lie now, *now*, on my death-bed, face to face with Satan and Hell. She was not like you, for her eyes were blue and her hair was golden, and yours are dark, but she had something of your look sometimes, something of your smile; her voice was a little like yours, too and—she was your child! and I hated the very sight of her face. She did not like me—how should she! I was a stranger to her. She was unhappy at the loss of her nurse; she was afraid of me; I hated her, and I dare say I was cruel to her, poor little child! At that time an English gentleman, who was staying in Naples, saw her, and took a great fancy to her, as she did to him. His own granddaughter, the same age as herself, had lately died of typhus fever; she was his son's child, and the only relative of any kind he had left. Alma pleased him very much; he fancied he could trace a resemblance between her and his dead grandchild, and, after a time, he offered to adopt her, to give her his name, to make her heiress of his fortune, and to take her to England to bring her up entirely as if she were his own; that she was not so, no one would know, for his son's little girl, whose parents were both dead since her birth, had been born in Italy, and had never been taken to England. I accepted his offer; I was only too glad to be rid forever of her—she made me think so constantly of you, and I hated you more bitterly since I had wronged you. I let her go, poor little child! I was glad to be rid of her. I had some sort of

conscience left, and I could not bear to hear her voice even in the distance; I could not bear to see her smile, for she seemed to haunt me and reproach me for the wrong I had done her father. I let her go with the Englishman; and I have never seen her since. God knows, wherever she has been, she has been better than she would have been with me. I have never seen her; but on Christmas-eve, at Notre-Dame, a young girl tendered me charity, and I do not know, but as I looked in her face something struck me as like your child's—as like what she would be now she is a woman. I do not know—it was very vague—but her smile made me think of you, and she gave me something of that sad, gentle, pitying look with which you had left me twenty years before. I know not how it was—most likely it was all fancy—but it made me think of her and of you. If I had not sent her from me, I should not be alone in my misery, as I am now!”

She ceased, and tears rolled slowly down her haggard cheeks. All her life this woman had thrown away all the human love that had been offered her; without it her death-bed was very cheerless, with but two memories beside it—of the husband she had wronged and the child she had deserted.

“You never knew that English stranger, Vivian?” she asked, wistfully.

“What was his name?” asked Sabretasche, coldly. His own warmer and gentler nature revolted from this woman's cold, undying hatred of himself, and remorseless abandonment of her child.

“Tressillian — Tressillian. I remember it, because I found, only the other day, the slip of paper on which he wrote it for me.”

“Tressillian!” repeated Sabretasche, with an involuntary start — “Boughton Tressillian! And your daughter's name?”

"Alma."

"Alma Tressillian! Good God!"

And as things long forgotten recur to memory at a sudden touch akin to them, he remembered how, the day the Molyneux footman had overturned Alma's pictures in Pall Mall, we had noticed her resemblance to his mother's portrait hanging in his drawing-room—how he himself, when he saw her at St. Crucis, had observed the likeness, too, though, occupied with other thoughts, it had made no impression upon him—Alma Tressillian his own daughter! Little as he had noticed her at that time, absorbed in his love for Violet, now, swift as thought, there came to his mind all he had ever seen or heard of her; he remembered his two visits to St. Crucis; he remembered her extraordinary talent for art—the genius inherited from himself; her brilliant and facile conversation, which had drawn so many men round her at Lady Molyneux's ball; Curly's adoration of her, the sudden flush of passion which had passed over De Vigne's face when, lying on his sick-bed at Scutari, Granville had asked him to seek her out, and made him promise never to tell her of his marriage; and he remembered, too, what Carlton had told that night in the Crimea, that she was the mistress of Vane Castleton. Was it true? Despite her education, her frankness, and her apparent sweetness and delicacy, had she, indeed, hid unseen within her the leaven of her mother's nature? Had heartlessness and sensuality and treachery of character been the sole inheritance his wife had bequeathed her child? As all these memories and thoughts rushed rapidly and disconnectedly through his brain, she watched the swift changes of expression which, like shadows across the earth, swept over his face.

She grasped his arm eagerly:

"You have seen her—you know her, Vivian? What is

she like now? Is she a true, fond, pure-hearted woman, or is she like me? Is she cursed with any of my vile passions? If she be, seek her out. For the love of Heaven, find her and redeem her from her fate, if to do it you must tell her how low her mother has fallen; her mother, who loved her less than the very beasts of the field can love their offspring."

To have told this dying wretched woman of that baseless scandal with Vane Castleton, of which he knew nothing, and which all his knowledge of human character made him doubt, would have been brutality. He answered her gently and soothingly:

"I have seen her; or, at least, I have seen an Alma Tressillian, whom I have always heard was Mr. Tressillian's granddaughter; not much of her, it is true, but sufficient to make me think her all that you could wish her to be—a 'true, fond, pure-hearted woman'—all that a mother might most long for her daughter to be. Will you swear to me before God that she was my child?"

With something of her old national vehemence—that vehemence of expression which Alma had inherited from her—the Tuscan kissed the little ebony crucifix that Madame Riollette had placed before her:

"I swear it, Vivian, as I hope for pardon for my sins from that God whom my whole life has outraged!"

Sabretasche silently bowed his head. He knew that though she might have lied to him the moment before, she would not have dared to swear a falsehood to him by that symbol, which her Church had taught her to hold so sacred; and though at another hour he would have smiled at the superstition which made an oath sacred, where, what *he* held most binding, honor, would have been broken ruthlessly, something, despite all his wrongs, touched him painfully in these hopeless last hours of the woman whom

he once had loved, and who had been his bride in that warm, glad, brilliant, poetic youth—that youth which she had quenched and ruined with the bitterness of betrayal and bound with the curse of iron chains.

She asked one more question :

“Where did you see her, Vivian?”

“Twice at her own home, and once at a ball at the house of one of our English nobles.”

“And was she happy?”

“She seemed so.”

“Thank God! You will never tell her about me—never mention me to her—never let her know that the mother who neglected her fell so low and vile that she was a beggar in the streets—a thing whom she passed by with a dole of charity, with a pitying shudder? Never tell her. Promise me you will not. Why should she hear of me, only to know that I first hated and then disgraced her? Promise me, Vivian!”

“I promise!”

Little as she could understand him, she knew him too well to exact an oath from him.

She looked at him wistfully :

“Vivian, you are very noble. You shame me far more with your goodness than you could do with curses and reproaches.”

“No,” answered Sabretasche, gently. “Not so. I have no claim to virtue. My life has been far too full of errors and self-indulgence for me to have title left to give me right to condemn another. If you have sinned, so have I. No human beings are spotless enough to judge each other. As for curses, God forbid! They would be rancorous, indeed, to follow you to the grave.”

She gave a weary sigh. What she said was true; his forgiveness humbled and shamed her more than any up-

braidings. Then her eyes closed, and she lay quite still. All the extraneous strength and vigor given her by the cordial which the surgeon had administered in his last visit had died away. She lay quite still, her breathing short and weak, her brow contracted, her limbs exhausted and powerless, the hand of death heavy upon her, her lips apart, her cheeks gray and hollow, her brain confused, and weighed down with the cloudy thoughts, and memories, and fears that haunted her last hours.

She lay quite still, and Sabretasche stood beside her, thinking of that strange accident which had led him to the death-bed of the woman who had made all the misery of his life; of that cruel and inexorable tie which had bound him for so long to one so utterly repugnant to every better taste and every nobler feeling; of the deep, unsolved problem of human nature; that book written in such different language for every reader, that it is little marvel that every man thinks his own the universal tongue, and fails even to spell out his brother's translation of it. This woman had hated him; he had loathed her: they had been bound by a tie the world chose to call indissoluble; they had been parted by a fierce and ineffaceable wrong; after twenty years' severance, what could this man and woman, once connected by the closest tie, once parted by the hottest passions, know of each other? what could they read of each other's heart? what could they tell or understand of each other's temptations, sufferings, and errors? And yet Church and Law had bound them together, till Death, more powerful and more kindly than their fellow-men, should come to the rescue and release them!

That lifelong union of Marriage! Verily, to enter into it, it needs a great and an abiding love. With human nature such as it now is on earth, the angel that man or woman clasps so tight, and hopes will bless them, is very

like to curse them ere they can let go their hold; and the vow they imagined they could take for all eternity, they soon tremble to think chains them in the presence of a deadly Lamia whom they deemed an angelic Beatrice, even for so short a span as a frail mortal life.

So he stood watching beside his dying wife. A future, fond and radiant, beckoned to him in the soft sweet haze of coming years; yet, ere he turned to it, he paused a moment to look back to the past, to its sorrow, its sin, its trial, its conflict; to her, the bride of his trusting and generous youth, the foe of his manhood, whose sting had festered in his heart for these long twenty years. And with a new-born and unutterable happiness trembling in him, a gentle and saddened pity stole over him for the broken wreck of humanity that lay palpitating its last feeble life-throbs before his eyes; and every harsh thought, all hatred, resentment, and scorn faded away, quenched in deep and unspeakable pity. If his character had been hers, his impulses, opportunities, education, temptation, hers, how could he tell but what his sins had been like hers also? They were such, indeed, to him, whose natural bias was generosity, and dearest idol honor, as seemed darkest and most loathsome; but in that dying chamber Sabretasche bowed his head, and turned his eyes from them. Just and tolerant to the last, he held it not his office to condemn—now, above all, when Death came as his avenger.

So he stood and watched beside his dying wife, the woman who had wedded him only to emancipate herself from an irksome village home, who had hated, wronged, betrayed him, and who had been for twenty years a ruthless barrier between himself and peace—stood and watched her, while without the bright morning light dawned in the eastern skies, and the song of the birds made sweet music

beneath the eaves, and the soft western winds swept in through the casement into the chamber of the dying;—herald of the Life born for him and come to him out of Death. Suddenly her eyes unclosed with a vague, lifeless stare, and she awoke to semi-consciousness as the bells of Notre-Dame chimed the hour of seven—awoke startled, dreamy, delirious.

“Hark! there is the vesper-bell. What is it—a salutation to the Virgin? Ah! I remember we used to gather the lilies and the orange-flowers to dress up the high altar; that was in Italy—poor Italy. I wish I could go there once—just once before I die, to see the vineyards, and the wheat-fields, and the olive-groves again. There are such sweet warm winds, such bright glowing skies—ah! I was happy, I was innocent, I was sinless *there!* Why are those bells ringing? Are they for vespers? No; it is a salutation to the Virgin—I forgot. We must take lilies, plenty of lilies for the altar; but *I* must not touch them, I should soil them, the lilies are so pure, so spotless, and I am so sunk, so polluted; the lilies would wither if my hands touched them, and the priests would thrust me from the altar, and the Virgin would ask me for my child. I used to pray; I cannot now. Hark! those bells are ringing for the vespers, and I know the words but I cannot say them. ‘*Pater noster qui es in cœlis.*’ What are the words? I cannot say them. Help me, help me! Why will you not say them? Pray, pray; do you hear—pray!”

With piteous agony the cry rang out on the still air of the breaking day, as the dews gathered gray and thick upon her brow and the glazing mist came over her sight, and in the darkness of coming death she struggled for memory and prayer, as a child gropes in the gloom.

“Pray—pray! What are the words? Say them—in pity, in mercy! *He* has forgiven!—God will forgive! Pray—pray!”

And the voice of the man whom her life had wronged fell softly on her ear through the dull, dizzy mists of death, as he bent over her and uttered with soothing pity the words of her Church, the prayer of her childhood, that from his lips to her was the seal of an eternal and compassionate Pardon :

“Pater noster qui es in cœlis, sanctificetur nomen tuum; adveniat regnum tuum; fiat voluntas tua sicûit in cœlo et in terra; panem nostrum quotidianum, da nobis hodie; et dimitte nobis debita nostra, sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris; et ne nos inducas in tentationem sed libera nos à malo. Amen !”

Standing beside his dying wife, Sabretasche spoke the prayer to the One Creator—the prayer that should have no Creeds; and as the old familiar words winged their way to her dying ear, bringing on their echoes soft chimes of days long past, and innocence long lost, the wild eyes grew tamer, the bent brow relaxed, the hardened lines of age and vice grew soft; and before the last Amen had left his lips, with one faint, broken, mournful sigh, she died, and he, standing beside her, bowing his head in reverence before the great mystery of life and death, thanked God that his last words to her had been of mercy and of pardon; that his last words had been to her the words of Arthur unto Guinevere—

All is passed; the sin is sinned, and I,
Lo! I forgive thee, as Eternal God
Forgives; do thou for thine own soul the rest.

II.

IN THE FOREST OF FONTAINEBLEAU.

ON the meeting of those so long held apart by the laws of Man, I need not dwell. Nothing now stood between them. Words were too cold to paint their present—a happiness as full, and even deeper still than that of two years before, from the anguish passed, which intensified their joy as the golden and rose-hued beauty of the sunset looks even fairer and brighter still when behind it lies a dark storm-cloud, passing fast away, but showing what the tempest has been. Nothing now stood between them; and within a few days of the night that Sabretasche had arrived in Paris, Violet Molyneux became his wife.

No empty conventionalities kept them apart; they cared nothing what the world wondered, nor how it talked; and they never thought of the malicious on dits and versions of their story, which were the one theme in Parisian salons. They went to the south of France for the whole of the coming year, to a château of the Duc de Vieillecour, near Pau. Both longed to be away from that gay effervescing world of which both were weary, and, under the purple skies, in the golden air, and amid the luxurious solitudes of the Midi, listening to the hushed and silvery murmur of the Garve, that chimed sweet cadence to their own joy—there, amid the voluptuous dreamy beauty of one of the fairest spots of earth, shut out from that fashionable world which had caressed, adored, and slandered him, far away from the fret and hum and buzz of outer life, Sabretasche surrendered himself to that love which gave him back his lost youth in all its glory and its poetry, and as night

slinks away before the fullness of the dawn, so the shadows of his past fell behind him for evermore.

* * * * *

Sabretasche kept his promise. Alma never knew that it was to her own mother she had given the charity she begged after midnight mass at the doors of Notre-Dame that Christmas-eve. All that had passed in that last interview with his dead wife, he told to Violet. To find in Alma Tressillian, her favorite, her friend—the daughter of her own lover—that child whom, without knowing or hearing of, she had instinctively hated for her mother's sake—hated with the fond, jealous vehemence with which a woman who loves hates all or anything that has any tie to, or connection with, her lover, or shows that another has been as near to him as she—that child of whom she could never bear to think, and loathed with all the rest of that fatal Tuscan brood, who were his curse and his foes,—to find Alma, Sabretasche's daughter, was, at the first flush, intensely painful to her.

"That woman's child!" she repeated, turning her brilliant eyes, flashing and earnest, upon him. "I can never see her again! Do not ask me, Vivian. I have been fond of her, but now I should never look upon her face without recalling her mother—the traitorous wife who could betray *you!*"

That was her first impulse; but her sense of justice conquered this. If she had never known her before, nothing on earth, I am sure, would have induced her to see the daughter of her lover and of his dead wife; and Sabretasche noticed the involuntary shudder with which she first met Alma, after his relation of her connection to himself: but Violet was at heart both too generous and too just to allow the feeling influence; and in truth, for I do not wish to claim for her any virtue she does not possess, she was

too full of her own perfect happiness—a joy so sudden, so vivid, that she trembled at touching the radiant wings of the angel lest it should flee away and leave her desolate again—to bear a harsh thought to any soul on earth, or, indeed, to think at all of them in that paradise in which his love had now lapped her.

There was more than Alma knew, in the kiss with which Violet's lips lingered on her brow when she bade her farewell on her marriage-day—there was love for him who was Alma's father—there was gratitude for her own joy, too deep for hate or anger to mingle with it—and there was, for the first time, a relenting pity for the dead woman who had wronged and thrown away that heart on which her own now rested so securely. Bound by his promise to his wife, Sabretasche had been undecided whether or not to tell Alma of the relation there was between them. It was almost impossible to tell her without letting her learn, at least in some degree, what her mother's character and life had been; her first questions so naturally would be about her mother, her dead mother, of whom she would be so anxious to hear all. He had nothing to say but what would pain her; nothing but what would compel him to break his latest promise to his dead wife. The girl firmly believed herself Boughton Tressillian's grandchild, and she revered and idolized his memory; it seemed a useless cruelty to break the associations and the belief of twenty years to substitute in their stead a parentage that must give her pain.

To Jockey Jack, Sabretasche, when he told him of his wife's death, told him also of the tie that existed between himself and Alma. He felt no rapture at the discovery, nor any sudden and wonderful affection for her sprung up in the night like a mushroom, after the custom of men who find unknown daughters in romances, and are prepared to

be devoted to them, good or bad, interesting or uninteresting, for the simple fact of their being their children. On the contrary, to know that there was one living who bore in her the blood of the wife who had been his curse was keenly painful to him; and though in herself Alma pleased him, he shrank from any remembrance or acknowledgment of her tie to himself. But, for De Vigne's sake, he had been interested in her before; and for this, and for her affection for Violet, he strove to conquer the repugnance that he felt to her from her mother; and he wished to place her above the necessity of relying upon her talents, and to give her that position in the world to which her adoption by Boughton Tressillian, as well as her relationship to himself, entitled her. To do this was difficult, without telling her what he wished to avoid; but, at Violet's suggestion, he placed in Lord Molyneux's hands a sum which, relying on her ignorance of business and of law, could be given her as a remnant of the property of her soi-disant grandfather, suddenly repaid by those who had swindled him of it. This, Jockey Jack, who would have done far greater services for the Colonel, whom he cried up in exact proportion as his Viscountess cried him down, willingly did. Alma, a few days after Violet's marriage, which took place at the British Embassy, heard the Viscount's relation of her sudden inheritance—heard it, unsuspecting that any other story was concealed behind it; she was too ignorant of all legal matters to detect any flaw there might be in Molyneux's version of the tale; she knew her grandfather had lost an immense fortune in the British Beggars' Bank, and in other speculations; she was not surprised a small portion should be recovered unexpectedly; and, indeed, beyond thanking Lord Molyneux for having so kindly interested himself in her concerns, the subject occupied but few of her thoughts. As Lord Molyneux had predicted, when

the Viscountess heard that Violet's protégée was really of good birth, (she of course was left to believe her a veritable Tressillian,) and entirely independent of her, she began to be exceedingly amiable to her, and offered her to stay with her if she liked.

"I shall have no expense for her dress," reasoned my lady. "Men like her almost as much as Violet, even though she was only a companion; if I introduce her as my protégée, with a good name and some money, she will draw. She is wonderfully fascinating if she likes, for such a little thing, and I like plenty of men about my house. That detestable St. Jeu d'Esprit hinted the other night that I was jealous of Violet—to keep another attractive girl with me will silence all that ridiculous scandal. Besides an orphan—an artiste with that lovely chevelure dorée, and that dead grandfather—one can make quite a roman about her. She is very generous, too; she will pay me well for living where she will have such social advantages, and really, with one's expenses, money grows quite serious. Yes, I will certainly keep her with me, and marry her well; it is so amusing to have something of that to do, and, when one can get her to give her opinion about dress, her taste is really exquisite, really wonderful, considering the seclusion she has lived in, where it must have been impossible to study it as it ought to be studied!" With which concluding reflection on that grand object of her life, and of many other women's lives too, the Toilette, Lady Molyneux rose from the depths of her fauteuil to go to confession. She had lately been received, with much solemnity in the Catholics, and much bewailing of the Protestants, into the bosom of the Roman Church; but whether she would remain there was a query, as twelve months before she had been as low as she could possibly go, and had gone to Exeter Hall, and, indeed, over the

water to Surrey Chapel, with as much perseverance as she now drove to her beloved *révérend père's* very elegant little chapel of Ste. Marie Réparatrice, who was certainly a cultivated and well-bred gentleman—more than can be said of all his heretical brethren across the Channel.

That eloquent and handsome young orator, after the fatigues of the winter season, where the odor of his sanctity and the beauty of his long black eyes had procured him more worshipers, penitents, and devotees than he knew very well what to do with, especially as they were, one and all, fiercely jealous of each other, and quarreled for him desperately, (or rather, of course, not for *him*, but for the aid of such a saint toward heaven,) was going to stay at Fontainebleau with Madame de Vieillecour. The Duchess had taken refuge, too, in religious excitements, and chiefly in that particular and most amusing one, changing her confessors; Cupid lurks so conveniently behind the grille of a confessional, where the little *méchant* can be shrived as soon as his mischief is done. He was going to stay at Madame de Vieillecour's charming villa, and, among many others, the Duchess had invited Lady Molyneux thither for a few days before that lady's departure for London; and the Viscountess, telling her a long and very pretty roman about her protégée—which it was quite a pity for Alma's fame as a heroine of romance should not be true—asked permission to bring her also to that bijou among villas, poetically named the *Diaman du Forêt*.

Alma went, leaving word with the porter at the house in the Champs Elysées to tell any gentleman that inquired for her that she was gone to stay with Lady Molyneux at Madame de Vieillecour's, at her villa, the *Diaman du Forêt*, Fontainebleau. Little as she knew of Sabretasche, the moment that she saw him in the salons of the Molyneux's

hotel, and that he had recognized her kindly and courteously, she had asked him, with that fervent warmth which blended so strangely in her with her proud and refined delicacy, for De Vigne—for Sir Folko. Sabretasche saw by the flush upon her cheeks the emotions which flitted, as all her thoughts and feelings did, across her expressive features, that that dangerous friendship had deepened, as he had predicted, into something far warmer and more tender on both sides, and spoke fully and earnestly in De Vigne's praise, and told her of his gallantry, his daring, and the safety with which, despite his brilliant and reckless courage, he had come through it all; but he did not tell her of De Vigne's illness, only mentioning that he had been detained in Scutari, and would soon come home, through Paris.

"Is the curse of the marriage-tie to fall there, too?" thought Sabretasche. "How will it end for them both?"

Alma went to Fontainebleau, and while in the brilliant salons of the Diaman du Forêt, among some of the greatest belles and the most sparkling wits of Paris, La Petite Tressillian was admired and sought for that unconscious and nameless fascination which her talents and her ways gave her over men; all she thought of was to escape by herself amid the beauty of the forest, and under the shadow of its stately oaks, its sea-pines, and the beautiful silver larches that fill the valleys of the Rocher d'Avon, give herself to that deep and rapturous happiness which awoke for her at the mere thought of De Vigne's return, as the sun bursts out in all its glory after a long and dark tempestuous night. In proportion to her susceptibility and suffering in sorrow, was her sanguine and elastic faith in any gleam of happiness.

It was early morning when De Vigne arrived in Paris.

Alma's letter had sent new life and strength into his

veins; from that hour he recovered, only retarded by that impatient and fiery nature which, unaccustomed to opposition or delay, chafed at the bodily weakness—that weakness at any time so great a trial to the strong man—which for the first time controlled his will and kept him fettered and powerless. But with hope came fresh health and fresh vigor; he recovered sufficiently to be moved on board the yacht of a man we knew, who, having come cruising about the Bosphorus, offered to give us a run to Marseilles. The sea air completed the recovery her letter had begun; he lay on the deck smoking, and breathing in with the fresh Mediterranean wind his old health and strength, and by the time the *Sea-foam* ran into the Marseilles harbor he was himself again, and would have been a dangerous foe for Vane Castleton to meet. At first he had meant to go at once to St. Crucis, for where Alma was, or what had become of her, he could not tell, since that letter was written on her sick-bed at Montessor's house in Windsor. Then suddenly he remembered that the second letter, which he had sent back to her in such mad haste on seeing the address, which confirmed Carlton's story, had been dated from the Champs Elysées, and thither he resolved to go, on the chance of finding her there before he went on to England.

It was early morning when we reached Paris—a bright, clear, sweet spring morning in May. After the discomfort, the dirt, the myriad disagreeables of Constantinople; after the mud and rain and snow and cheerlessness of the Crimea,—how gay and pleasant looked those lively, sunny, bustling streets of Paris, where everybody seemed de bonne humeur, where primroses and violets, cassi and lemonade, were being cried; where Polichinelle was performing, and char-à-bancs starting with light-hearted students for a day in the Bois du Boulogne; and everywhere around us were

heard chattering, laughing, voluble and musical, that merry, silvery, pleasant language, as familiar to us as our own! What a contrast it was—a contrast very agreeable, let a man be ever so voué au tambour, after nearly two years such campaigning as we had tasted in the Crimea!

I drove at once to the English station. De Vigne wanted me no more, and they at home at Longholme were very impatient for my arrival; evergreens, triumphal arches, October brewed at my birth, county congratulations, and every possible fatted calf, awaiting me under the friendly shadow of my dear old Buckinghamshire beech woods. As I shook his hand as we parted, I saw he was impatient to be rid of me, and I saw on his face that eager, restless, passionate glow which told me he would never rest until he had found Alma Tressillian. How would it end, I wondered, as I rolled along in the chemin de fer to Calais? Did he ask himself so wise a question? I fancy not. Never all his life long had he ever asked how any step in his career would end. If he had ever done so, that coarse and vulgar beauty, with her ronge, and her tinting, and her embonpoint, and her cruel glittering eyes, now drinking her coffee with that dash of brandy in it she had copied from old Fantyre, reading the dirtiest of Le Brun's stories, in her scarlet peignoir, before she attired herself regally, to be driven by little Anatole de Beauvoisier to a fête at Fontainebleau, would not have been called by Church and Law his Wife.

"Est ce que Mademoiselle Tressillian démure ici?" he asked at the entrance of the hotel which Lady Molyneux had just vacated.

"Non, monsieur. Elle est partit il y a huit jours, et Miladi aussi pour Fontainebleau. Elles sont allées visiter chez Madame la Duchesse de Vieillecour, à sa maison de plaisance."

“Quelle Miladi?”

“Miladi Molyneux, Madame la Vicomtesse.”

“Où est la maison de plaisance?”

“A Fontainebleau; le Diaman du Forêt, monsieur. Tout le monde le sait.”

With which assurance the porter awaited his departure, to return to his plate of onion soup inside his den; and De Vigne, signing a fiacre, bade them drive him to the Gare for Fontainebleau.

Minutes seemed to him hours; the train appeared to creep along its weary ironway; everything was dark and strange to him. How Alma could possibly have become acquainted with the Molyneux, still more reside with them, and go with the Viscountess to stay with Madame de la Vieillecour, appeared inexplicable. The devil of doubt again possessed him. The letter that vowed her love to him had been written nearly two years before. Since then she might have changed; she might have loved some other; she might even have pledged herself to another man! He tortured himself with every form of dread and doubt, as the train dragged on through the campagne printanière, till it stopped at Fontainebleau, the sun shining on the quiet French town, on the stately historic castles, on the deep majestic woods that hid in their bosom alike the loves of Henri Quatre, the beauty of Gabrielle d'Estrées, the death of the grand Condé, and the despair of the man who, abandoned alike by his courtiers whom he had ennobled, his marshals whom he had created, and his people whom he had rescued from the bloody fangs of The Terror, signed the act of his abdication in the magnificent halls of his favorite palace; where that child was baptized who has lived to restore his name and ascend his throne.

The train stopped at Fontainebleau. De Vigne knew it well enough. He had often been there for gay summer

fêtes, where the time had passed with sparkling wine and evanescent wit and light laughter and ephemeral love, before his marriage had darkened his life. The train stopped, and he went at once to the Hôtel de la Ville de Lyon, where, fifteen or sixteen years before, he remembered giving a brilliant dinner to Rose Luillhier, the then première danseuse of the Opéra, a gay, flippant little blonde, whom he had driven round in a four-in-hand by the Carrefours des Boux and Franchard to see the Roche qui Pleure, and had drunk champagne and sung Béranger songs, and enjoyed his Bacchanalia with all the joyous careless revelry of spirits undamped and unwearied.

Now, Rose Luillhier was a faded, ugly, broken-down woman, who, falling through a trap-door and ruining her beauty forever, had been glad to keep a mont de piété in a small way in a dingy, dark, loathsome hole in the Faubourg d'Enfer; and he—he dared not trust his present; he dared not look at his future!

He went to the Ville de Lyon, and inquired the way to Madame de la Vieillecour's maison de plaisance. It lay on the other side of the forest, to the southwest, they told him, and they had not a carriage left in the coach-house, nor a horse in the stable, there were so many pleasure parties to the forest or the palace in this month. He went to the Londres, to the Nord, to the Aigle Noir, to the Lion d'Or; all their conveyances were hired. It was a saint's day and a holiday in Paris, and numerous parties of every grade had come to spend the sweet spring-hours in the leafy shades and majestic futailles of Fontainebleau. He went to Nargein's and to Bernard's, in the Rue de France; but he could find no conveyance there. Impatient of delay, he asked how far it was to walk.

“Mais à peu près sept kilometres, monsieur,” said the man of whom he inquired. “Voyez donc, monsieur!

Vous parterez par la Barrière de Paris, vous suivrez le chemin de chasse jusqu' à la Batte des Aires, et alors vous prendrez le sentier jusqu' au forêt du Gros Fouteau. Eh bien ! apres cela vous prendrez le sentier de l'Amitié et dans un quart d'heure vous serez aux Gorges de la Solle après, monsieur——”

Ve Vigne heard no more of the Frenchman's voluble and bewildering directions ; a fierce oath broke from him under his breath as three carriages swept past him. In the first sat a young Parisian *lion*, and the woman who called herself his wife. From under her parasol of pink silk and lace, as she leaned forward, full blown, high-colored, coarse, with a smile on her lips, and that vindictive triumph in her cruel eyes which he knew so well, he saw her face—that face unseen for eleven long years, since the day he had thrown her from him in the church at Vigne. He knew her in an instant, despite every alteration—and they were not few that time had made—and faint and sick he reeled against the wall of Nargein's dwelling.

Thinking of Alma, to see the Trefusis, the woman he so unutterably loathed, so fiercely hated ! Was it prophetic that that she-devil should forever stand between him and the better angel of his life ? She knew him, too, for she started visibly ; then she leant forward and bowed to him, with a cruel, mocking, fiendish smile.

“Qui le diable est cet bel homme, Constance ?” asked Anatole de Beauvoisier.

“Mon mari,” answered the Trefusis, with her coarse, harsh laugh.

Anatole had a great admiration for this handsome Englishwoman, yet he estimated her rightly enough to murmur to himself, “Pauvre diable ! je le plains !”

A deadly sickness came over De Vigne, and a fierce ungovernable thirst for vengeance on her entered into him.

He hated her so unspeakably. Great Heaven! how could it be otherwise? that woman who stood an eternal bar between him and love, and peace, and honor

He broke from Nargein's foreman with a hasty *douceur* of a gold five-franc, which took the stead of the thanks he could not utter for his bewildering direction, and took the route by the *Barrière de Paris*, trusting to his memory to lead him right across the forest, for he had recollected the situation of the *Diaman du Forêt* as soon as they had told him at the *Ville de Lyon* that a few years ago it had belonged to the *Comte de Torallhier-Moreau*, a man whom *De Vigne* had known, and with whom he had had more than one night of *lansquenet* and merry French wit at that same *Diaman du Forêt*, then called the *Bosquet de Diane*. He followed the hunting-path that leads to the magnificent forest of the *Grand Fouteau*. It was now after noon, and the soft golden sunlight turned to bronze the giant bolls of the old oaks and elms, and slept quietly on the soft green moss that carpeted the woodland. All around him was hushed in the heart of the great royal forest, the waters of the lakes were silent, the fountains fell with only a dreamy and silvery murmur, the sunshine trembled on the graceful silver boughs of the "*Dames du Forêt*," and the birds were singing with soft subdued joy in the dense foliage of those shadowy avenues and *futailles* that had used to echo with the bay of hounds, the ring of horses' hoofs, the mellow notes of hunting calls, when through their sunny glades the gay courtiers of *François de Valois*, *Henri de Navarre*, and *Louis de Bourbon* had ridden for the pleasure of the *Chasse* and the *Curée*. All was silent around him, save for the sweet musical murmur, nameless yet distinguishable, as of the coming summer breathing its life and spirit into the tender leaves, the waving grasses, and the waters of lake and fountain, long chilled and silenced by the iron

touch of the past winter. At another time the glory and beauty round him—from the giant grandeur of the oaks and beeches that had flung their shadows on the brilliant beauty of the mother of the Vendôme, and the fair sad brow of the Mistress of Bourbon and of Bragelonne, to the merry hum of the joyous gnats born yesterday to die to-morrow, dancing and whirling in the sunshine like the gay Human Life that from Philippe le Bel to Louis Napoléon have held their rendezvous, their fêtes, their love-trysts, and their hunting-parties in the royal forest, group after group supplanting those that pass away—would have awakened and aroused him. But now the very calm and loveliness about him irritated and chafed him, for his soul was dark with fiery passions and fierce thoughts, vain regrets and vehement desires, and his love for Alma Tresillian, his hate for the woman who bore his name and who had so foully cheated him, rioted within him like boiling oil and seething flame mingled together. He strode along through the hunting-path, edged on one side with brushwood and on the other with great forest trees, only thinking sufficiently of the way he went to take the paths that bore to the northwest, where he knew, on leaving the forest, he should find the maison de plaisance somewhere between Fontainebleau and Chailly. He struck into the *Fulaci du Gros Fouteau*, knowing that, by keeping to his left, he should come upon the road to Chailly, brushing his way through the tangled forest-branches that had stood the sunshine and the storm of lengthened centuries. As he swung along, his eyes upon the ground, blind to all the beauty of the woodlands, he glanced upward to put aside the boughs; and—with an inarticulate cry he sprang forward.

Half sitting, half lying on the fallen trunk of a beech that had been struck by lightning a few days before, her

hat on the grass beside her, the sunshine falling down through the thick branches on to her brilliant golden hair, and her delicate, intelligent, expressive features, expressive even in complete repose, and while her eyes, fixed on the turf at her feet, were veiled beneath her silky curling lashes, he saw once more the face that he had last seen lifted to his in the summer moonlight at St. Crucis nearly two years passed and gone!

At the sound of the voice which, in the hum and murmur of society and the solitude of the long night-watches, she had thirsted, yearned, prayed to hear again, Alma looked up—in another moment she was in his arms, clinging to him as if no earthly power should ever part them; weeping passionate tears of joy, then laughing in her agony of gladness; her soft warm lips pressed to his, her hands clasped round his neck as if she would never let him go from her again, while she had strength, or life, or power to keep him; while dizzy with the delirium of passion and of rapture that surged up in tenfold strength after those weary years of absence and of torture, he lifted her from the ground and held her in his passionate embrace, crushing her against his heart, their long and mute caresses more eloquent than words. Then Alma raised her face to his, flushing with a bright crimson glow, and fading to a marble whiteness, her eyes almost black with that eager joy which shone in them through their tears, her arms clinging closer and closer round him, her voice trembling with the love which her vehement Southern nature had poured out upon De Vigne.

“You do not doubt me now? You know how I love you—only you? You will never leave me again?”

“Never, my God!—never!” And as he poured out upon her in his breathless caresses the passion which words

were too cold and tame to utter, he forgot—for the time, utterly, entirely forgot—that cold, cruel, jeering, coarse, vindictive face that had passed him but an hour before, and—forgot, also, the tie that bound him.

It was long ere they could summon calmness enough to talk of all that both had suffered in those long and weary months. Their joy was too deep for any effort at tranquillity; all she cared for was to look up into his eyes, to murmur his name every now and then as if to assure her of his presence, to lavish upon him with tears of joy that caressing and vehement fondness natural to her in all the abandon and fervor of her Italian blood; all he cared for was to have such love poured out on him; to drink, after lengthened and unbearable drought, of the fresh sweet waters of human affection; to lavish on the only thing that he loved, and that loved him, all the pent-up well-springs of his heart; to hold her there close—close, so that none could come to rob him of her a second time—the one lost to him for so long!

Do you wonder at him? Go and travel in Sahara, across that great, dreary, blinding, shadowless, hopeless plain of glaring yellow sand, where you see no living thing save the vulture whirling aloft awaiting some dead camel ere it can make its loathsome feast; travel with the thirst of the desert upon you, your throat parching, your eyes starting, your whole frame quivering with longing for the simple drop of water which your fellows fling away unvalued. When you come to the clear, cool springs flowing with musical ripple under the friendly shadows of the banyans and the palms, would you have the courage to turn away and leave the draught untasted, and go back alone into the desert to die?

It was long before they could speak of what they had both suffered, and when she told him all, more fully than

sne could in writing, of Vane Castleton's treachery and brutality, the dark fierce blood surged over his brow, and a gloom came upon his face which boded her foe no good.

"By Heaven! if a man's hand can revenge such things, he shall pay bitterly for his coward plot," he muttered to himself.

"What are you saying?" asked Alma.

He kissed the lips which he would not answer:

"Do not ask, my darling. To think that dastard villain dared to lay his hand upon you wakes a devil in me. My God! to hear of such a brutal plot against what he loves best and holds most tenderly, would wake a milder man than I to fury. My darling, my precious one! to think that brute should have ventured to lure you in his hateful toils, should have polluted your ears with his loathsome vows, should have dared to touch your little hand with his——"

He stopped; his fierce anger overmastered him. To think Vane Castleton had dared to insult her; to think his dastard love, which was poison to any woman, should have been breathed on her, on whom he would have had the summer wind never play too rudely; to think that his hated kiss should have ventured to touch those soft, warm lips, pure as ungathered rose-leaves, that were consecrated wholly to himself! De Vigne vowed bitterly to himself to revenge it as none of Vane Castleton's deeds had been revenged before.

"Never mind it," whispered Alma, caressingly. *She* had no fear of De Vigne's darkest passions—indeed, they endeared him to her. "Do not think of it. He is a bad man; but, since he could not part us, we may surely forgive him, or, at least, forget him? Now I have *you* back. I could pardon anything. When life is so beautiful and God's mercy so great, one can rarely harbor hard thoughts

of any one. It is when we *suffer* that we could revenge.

He pressed her closer to his heart:

“You are better than I, my little one!”

“No!” said Alma, passionately, “I am better than none; still less am I better than you, noble, generous, knightly as you are in thought and in deed, in heart and in soul. I loved and revered you before more than any woman ever did man, but since your courage, your suffering, your daring, your heroism, I love you more dearly, I reverence you more highly, if indeed it be possible, my love, my lord, my husband!”

As the last word fell on his ear, De Vigne started as at a mortal wound from the steel! That title from her lips struck him keenly, bitterly as any sword-thrust!—to have to tell her he had deceived her, to have to give a death-blow to that unsuspecting confidence, that deep, true love, that radiant, shadowless happiness with which she clung to him, as if, now they were together, life had brought her a heaven upon earth which no shadow would have power to cloud; to have to quench the light in her sunny eyes, and tell her that another called him by that name!

The hand that held both hers trembled; the warm, passionate glow faded off his face; his heart turned sick: how could he tell her that for three long years the secret of his life had been withheld from her—that, married, he had gone to her as a free man—that, bound himself, he had won her love in all its depth and fervency—that, trusted implicitly, worshiped entirely, he had gone on from day to day, from week to week, with that fatal tie unacknowledged, that dark and cruel secret unconfessed? And she looked up in his face, too, as she clung to him, with such a world of love and worship, such a glory of passionate and eager joy in her brilliant, loving eyes, that seemed never to weary

of gazing into his! And he had to say to her: "Your trust is unmerited. I have deceived you!"

Never until that hour had De Vigne realized the whole horror, weight, and burden of the fetters the Church had lent its hand to forge eleven long years before. Unconsciously and innocently the woman, who would have periled her life to save him a single pang, struck a yet sharper blow to the just-opened wound! Noticing the gloom that gathered in his eyes, Alma, to dispel, laughed, with her old gay and childlike insouciance, which she had never felt before since the evening they had parted in the little studio at St. Crucis.

"Yes, Sir Folko, in one thing I *am* better than you. I have more faith! You could doubt and disbelieve your own Alma; you could think that, after loving *you*, she could desert, and forget, and betray you; you could credit cruel reports that made her the most false, contemptible, loathsome of her sex—but *I* never dreamt of doubting *you*, though I might have done so. Sir Folko, I had stronger evidence still! But I trusted you, my lord, my love! I would have disbelieved angels had they come to witness against you; in your absence none should dare to slander you to me; and if they had brought proofs of every force under the sun, I would have thrown them in their teeth as falsehoods and forgeries, if they had stained *your* honor!"

She spoke now with that vehement eloquence which always came to her when roused to any deep emotion or warm excitement; her eyes flashed, and her face glowed with love, and pride, and faith. Yet—every one of those noble and tender words quivered like a knife in his heart! He bent his head till his brow rested on her hair; and the man, whose iron nerves had not quailed, nor pulse beat one shade quicker, before the deadly flame blazing from

the thirty guns at Balaklava, shuddered as he thought, "How can I tell her I have deceived her!" Unconscious of the effect her words had on him, or the sting which lay for him in her noble and innocent trust, Alma went on—a glow of scorn, contempt, and haughty impatience at the memory passing over her face, with one of those rapid mutations of expression which gave her face one of its greatest charms:

"Oh, Granville, how I hated that woman that Lord Vane sent to pretend to be your wife! He was very unwise not to choose some one a little more refined, and like what your wife might have been! She was such a bold, coarse, cruel-eyed woman, with not the trace of a lady in her, for all her showy, gorgeous dress. Who do you think she could have been? Some actress, I should fancy—should not you?—whom he paid to take the rôle, but she did it very badly." And Alma laughed—a low, glad, silvery laugh—at the recollection. "She was not much like a woman who had loved and lost you; there was not a shadow of regret, or tenderness, or softness in her when she spoke of you, and to think she should dare to take *your* name—should dare to presume to claim *you*! And she actually had the audacity to show me your name on that piece of paper that she called a marriage-certificate. I don't know whether it was like one, for I never saw one; but they had written your name. Oh! Granville, how I hated her—the coarse, audacious, insulting woman, who dared to assume your name! I could have struck her—I could have done anything to her. She roused my 'devil,' as you call it. If she had stayed another moment I should have rung for nurse to turn her out of the room. It sounds absurd to say so, for she was such a tall, dashing, would-be grandiose woman; but I do think she was afraid of me—she did not like me to look straight at her and detect her

falsehoods But I never believed her, my own dearest—never for a moment. Thank God, my trust in you never wavered for an instant, and she never tempted me even in one passing thought to disgrace you with the doubt that that coarse, bad woman had ever been your wife. Thank God, I was too worthy of your love to insult you, even with a thought of credence in her ill-laid plot——!”

“Stop, stop—for the love of Heaven—or you will kill me!” burst involuntarily from De Vigne. He felt as if his heart would break, his brain give way, if she said another word to add to the coals of fire she was heaping so innocently upon his head! Every word she uttered in her unconscious gladness, in her noble faith, seemed to brand his soul with shame and suffering, which years would never have power to efface;—to have to tell her her trust had been misplaced—to have to confess to her that the woman whom she truly thought would disgrace him *was* his wife—to have to listen to those fond, proud, trusting words, and answer them with what would quench and darken all her glad and generous faith, and, for aught he knew, turn from him forever that love to which he clung with all the strength and passion of his nature! Proud, candid, worshipping truth as she did, would she love him still when she knew that for three long years that dark secret had been kept unspoken and unconfessed between them? Idolizing and reverencing him as she did, thinking him matchless for honor, nobility, and stainless aristocracy of blood, and name, and character, could he hope to keep that idolatry, which was so dear to him, when she heard that he had allied himself to one whom even her slight knowledge of her had seen to be utterly unworthy and beneath him—when she heard that he, whose idol, like her own, had been honor, had kept hidden and shrouded from her the dark, inexorable bonds with which the marriage-tie had chained and weighed him down?

Startled and terrified, she tried to look into his face ; but his head was bent, so that she could see nothing save the blue veins swelling on his forehead.

“Granville, dearest, what have I said—what have I done? Speak to me, answer me, for Heaven’s sake!”

He did not answer her. What could he say? The veins on his temples grew like cords, and all the glow of eagerness and passion, so bright on his face a few moments ago, faded away into that dead, gray pallor which had overspread his face upon his marriage-day. A vague and horrible terror came over the woman who loved him. She threw her arms round his neck ; she pressed her warm lips to his forehead, pale and lined with the bitter thoughts in his brain ; she only thought of him then, never of herself.

“Granville, tell me, what have I said—I, who would give my life to spare you the slightest pain?”

He seized her in his arms ; he pressed her against his heart, throbbing to suffocation :

“My worshiped darling ! do not speak gently to me ! That woman is my wife !”

It was told at last—the stain on his name, the curse on his life, the secret kept so long ! Her face was raised to his ; its fair, girlish bloom changed to his own bloodless and lifeless pallor, her eyes wide open, with a vague, amazed horror in them. She scarcely understood what he had said ; she could not realize it in the least degree.

“Your wife !” she repeated, mechanically, after him
“*Your* wife ! Granville, darling, you are jesting, you are trying me ; it is not true !”

He held her closer to him, and rested his lips on her golden hair ; he could not bear to see those fond, frank eyes gaze into his with that pitiful terror, that haunting, pleading earnestness which would not believe even his own words against him !

“God forgive me, it is true!”

With a cry that rang through the old beech woods and oak coppices of the forest, Alma bowed down before the blow dealt to her by the hand that loved her best. She did not weep, like most women, but her heart paused almost long enough for life to cease. She gasped for breath; the blood rushed to her brain, crimsoning all her face, then left it white and colorless as death. She pressed her hand upon her heart, struggling for breath, looking up in his face all the while, as a spaniel that its master had slain would look up in his, the love outliving and pardoning the death-blow.

For the moment he thought he had killed her. Like a madman, he called upon her name; he covered her blanched lips with caresses passionate enough to call back all their life and warmth; he vowed to Heaven that he loved her dearer than any husband ever loved his wife; that he hated the woman who bore his name—wretch, fiend, she-devil that she was! He called her his own, his love, his darling; he swore never to leave her while his life lasted; he besought her, if ever she had cared for him, to look at him and tell him she forgave him!

She did not shrink from him a moment, but clung the closer to him, breathless, trembling, quivering with pain, like a delicate animal after a cruel blow, her heart throbbing wildly against his. She looked up in his face with that passionate love which would never change to him nor desert him:

“Forgive you! Yes, what would *I* not forgive you! But——”

Her voice broke down in convulsive sobs, and she lay in his arms weeping unrestrainedly, with all the force and vehemence of her nature; while he bowed his head over her, and his own bitter, scorching tears fell on her bright

golden hair. He let her weep on and on, her strongest and deepest feelings pouring themselves out in that resistless tide of emotion which with her never relieved, but rather increased, her suffering. He could not speak to her; he could only clasp her tighter and tighter to him, murmuring broken, earnest words of his agonized remorse.

Once she looked up at him with those radiant eyes, from which he had quenched the light and glory:

“You do not love her, Granville? You cannot!”

There was her old passionate vehemence in the question—as passionately he answered her:

“Love her! Great Heaven! no word could tell you how I *hate* her; how I have hated her ever since that cursed day when she first took my name, to stain it and dishonor it. My precious one! my hate for her is as great as my love for you; greater it cannot be!”

“And yet—she is your wife! Oh God have pity on us!”

Her lips turned white, as if in bodily pain, her eyes closed, and she shivered as with great cold.

He pressed her against his heart; great drops of suffering stood upon his brow. It was an agony greater than death to him to see the misery on her young, radiant face, and to know that he had brought it there—he who would have sheltered her from every chill breath, guarded her from every touch of the sorrow common to all human kind.

“Would to Heaven I had died before my selfish passions brought the shadow of my curse on your young head!” he muttered, as he bent over her. “Alma, you forgive me—but you cannot love me after I have deceived you. You cannot love me, false as I have been to my own dol of truth and honor. God knows I meant no deliber-

me wrong. I went on and on from day to day, till what had been at first merely distasteful to tell, became at last impossible! Answer me; can your affection survive the bitter wrong I have done it? Can you love me though I fall from your ideal, though I have sunk so low?"

Breathless he waited for her answer—breathless and trembling, his face white as hers, his firm and haughty lips quivering with suspense, his head bent and humbled, as he made one of the hardest, yet one of the noblest confessions a proud man can ever make—"I was wrong!"

She lifted her face to his, so true to the generous and faithful and unswerving love that, two years before, she had promised him, that even in the first bitterness of her grief her thought was of him and not of herself.

"Love you? I *must* love you while my life lasts. Nothing could change me to you; if you were to err, to alter, to fall as low as man can fall, you would but be the dearer to me; and if all the world stoned and hooted you, I would cling the closer to you, and we would defy it, or endure it—together!"

She spoke again, with her old vehemence, her arms twining close about his neck, her lips soft and warm against his cheek, her eyes gazing up into his, dark and brilliant with the impassioned love that was the life of her life; then—the passion faded from her eyes, the glow from her face; with a convulsive sob her head drooped upon her breast, and she fell forward on his arm, weeping hopelessly, wearily, agonizedly, as I saw a woman in the Crimea weep over her husband's grave.

"God help me! I do not know what I say. If I am wrong tell me; if I sin, slay me—but cease to love you I *cannot!*"

PART THE TWENTY-SIXTH.

I.

THE TEMPTATION OF A LIFE.

IN a few broken, earnest words, De Vigne told her of that fatal marriage-bond which had cost him his mother's life, stained his own name, banished him from his ancestral home, cursed his life with a bitter and futile regret, and now brought misery on a life dearer than his own; and it touched him deeply to see, as she listened to his story, how utterly her own sorrow was merged into her grief for him; her misery at all he had suffered in his cruel bondage; her loathing, at the thought of all he had borne for those eleven long years, in even nominal connection with such, as her quick perception had told her the Trefusis must be. It touched him deeply to see how her own wrongs, and his want of candor and of truth toward her, faded away unremembered in her grief and sympathy for him, and she was more dear, more dangerous to him in that hour of suffering, than in her most brilliant, her most tender, her gayest, sweetest, or most bewitching moments.

Wrapt in that silent communion, absorbed in the bitterness in which the first moments of their reunion were steeped, neither heard a footfall on the forest turf, nor saw the presence of one, who, drawing near them, looked on the completion of that vengeance which had struck its first blow so many years before, and now came to deal its last. They neither saw nor heard her, till her chill, coarse, harsh tones stirred the sweet, soft air.

“Miss Tressillian, two years ago you chose to disbelieve

or feign to disbelieve, my claims upon your lover. Ask Major De Vigne now, in my presence, if he can dare to deny that I am his lawful wedded wife?"

With an involuntary cry of horror, Alma looked up, instinctively clinging closer to De Vigne in the presence of this woman, so loathsome and so hateful to them both. With a fierce oath he sprang to his feet, standing once more face to face, as he had stood at the marriage-altar of Vigne, with the woman whom the Church had made his wife. There they met at last in the solemn, silent aisles of the great royal forest, heaven above head, nature around so calm, so fair, so peaceful; there they met at last, those two fierce foes whom the marriage-laws assumed to hold as "two whom God had joined together!" she looking at him with her cruel laugh, a leering triumph in her cold glittering eyes, a devilish sneer upon her lip, hating him with the chill, ceaseless hate which evil natures feel for those whom they have wronged; he gazing down on her, his brow crimson with the conflicting passions warring in him, his eyes flashing fire on her, his face dark with the anger, the loathing, and the scorn the very sight of her at such a moment roused in him. Between him, clinging to his arm in vague terror for him, as if to shield him from the cruel hatred of his wife and deadliest foe—clinging to him as if she defied all power to part them, yet feared some hand stronger than her own which would wrench them asunder—was the woman he loved. On the one hand, the she-devil that had cursed his life; on the other, the better angel, which had nestled in his heart to touch all its deeper chords and waken all its purer aspirations.

The Trefusis looked at him, and smiled a smile that chilled his blood as the cold gleam of the dagger in the moonlight chills the blood of a man waking from sweet

dreams to find himself fettered and bound in the clutches of his most cruel foe.

"Ask him, Miss Tressillian!" she said again. "You disbelieved me. See if Granville De Vigne, who in by-gone days used to boast very grandly of his truth and honor, dare tell you a lie before my face, and say that I am not his lawful wife."

Cold and haughty rushed the words to Alma's lips, her dark-blue eyes flashing with the scorn and the fire latent in her semi-Southern nature, and impetuous passion blazing into flame:

"Major De Vigne would not lower himself so far to your level as to tell a falsehood, though he well might be tempted to renounce the stain upon his name of connection with such as yourself. But he has nothing to confess. I know all; and if the sorrow be his, the shame of his marriage rests solely upon you."

The Trefusis laughed scornfully to cover her mortification. She had never counted on De Vigne having himself confessed his marriage, and she was cheated of her wished-for triumph in tearing from him his last love, in seeing his haughty head bowed before her, and in driving from his side the woman whom she hated, for that one cutting speech at St. Crucis, almost as bitterly as she hated him.

She laughed that coarse, harsh laugh which, with many other of the traces of her origin and her innate vulgarity, had crept out since, her aim now attained, she had flung off that ever-uncongenial gloss and varnish of refinement which she had assumed to lure De Vigne.

"You take the high hand, young lady! Well, you are very wise to make the most of a bad bargain; and since you cannot be his wife, to pretend it is the more honorable post to be his mistress! I wish you joy; his love has ever been so very famous for its constancy!"

“Woman! silence!” broke in De Vigne, so fiercely, that even the Trefusis paused for the moment, and shrank from the lurid fire flashing from his eyes, and the dark wrath gathered in his face. “If you dare to breathe another of your brutal insults in her ear, I vow by Heaven that your sex shall not shield you from my vengeance. You have wronged me enough. You shall not venture to try your coarse insolence and ribald jests on one as high above you in her purity and nobility and truth as yon heavens are above the earth! My love, my darling!” he whispered passionately, bowing his head over Alma, who still clung to his arm, her color changing from a crimson flush to an ashy whiteness, her face full of horror, terror, loathing, scorn at the first coarse words that had ever been spoken to her—that had ever breathed to her of shame! “do not heed her; do not listen to her. She is a bold, bad woman, who cares not what she says, so that it may sting or injure me. Oh, God, forgive me! that I should have brought you into this!”

“Purity! nobility!” re-echoed the Trefusis, with her cold, loud laugh. “Since when have those new idols had any attraction for you, cher Granville? In by-gone days all you used to care for were, if I recollect rightly, a carnation bloom and a fine figure; and if the external pleased your senses, I never knew you care particularly for the over-cleanliness of mind and character. How long have you begun to learn platonics? The rôle will hardly suit you long, I fancy. Why, we shall have you ‘moral’ next, and preaching ‘pure’ religion. A leopard cannot change his spots, we have holy authority for believing; nor can you change your nature, and keep faithful six months together. If Miss Tressillian likes to be added to the string of your cast-off loves, it is no concern of mine, though you *are* my husband.”

His face grew white as death; he to stand by and hear Alma insulted thus? With a fierce gesture he lifted his arm; forgetful of her sex, he would have struck her in his wrath, his grief, his insulted pride, his maddened passions; but Alma caught his arm:

"For my sake——"

The low, trembling words, the touch of her little soft hand, the sight of her pale, upraised face, with its dark fond eyes, stood between him and his passion as no other thing on earth would have done. For "her sake" his arm dropped, and he stopped in that mad anger in which, if he had given reins to it, he could have murdered the woman who, not content with vengeance upon him, must come to wreak it on another dearer than himself. The dark blood surged again over his brow; he put his hand upon his breast, as he had done at the marriage-altar, to keep down the storm of passions raging in his heart.

"Out of my sight, out of my sight," he muttered, "or by Heaven I shall say or do that you will wish to your dying day unsaid and undone!"

Something in the grand wrath of his tempestuous and fiery nature awed and stilled even the Trefusis; a dogged sullenness overspread her face; she was foiled and mastered, and for the first time her revenge was wrested from her grasp. Whether she would have left him subdued by a nature even stronger than her own, or whether she would have stood her ground and expended the vulgar anger of her character in coarse jests and ribald sneers, I cannot tell; for at that minute light laughter and lighter footsteps, and low merry voices, broke on their ear, and through the beech-boughs of the Gros Fouteau came Madame de la Vieillecour and her party, who, having a sort of fête champêtre in the forest, had come to look for La Petite Tressillian, whom they had left alone, at her

own request, to sketch the sunlight glancing off and on among the massive branches and budding leaves of Richelieu's Oak.

Madame de la Vieillecour recognized De Vigne with surprise; she saw, moreover, that she and her party were come at an untimely season on a painful scene; but, like a well-bred woman of the world, showed neither astonishment nor consciousness, but coming forward with her delicate gloved hands outstretched, welcomed him home with pleasant fluent French words of congratulation and pleasure.

It was well for him that he had learnt, long years before, the first lesson society gives its pupils: to smile when their hearts are breaking; to seem calm and courteous when fiercest thoughts are rioting within; to wear a pleasant, tranquil, unmoved air while the vultures gnaw at their life-strings, as the Indian at his funeral pyre smiles on those who would fain see him quiver and hear him groan. It was well for him that he had learnt "good breeding" in its most essential point; knew how to suffer and give no sign—a lesson they learn to the highest perfection who suffer most—or he could hardly have answered Madame de Vieillecour as he did, calmly, courteously listening to her fluent congratulations, while the stormy passions, just aroused in all their fullest strength, raged and warred in his heart; while on the one side stood the woman he so passionately loved, on the other the wife he as passionately loathed.

"Come back to dinner with us," continued Madame de Vieillecour; "the carriages are waiting near. Alma, ma belle, you look ill; you are tired, and the sun has been too hot."

She turned away with her gay party, talking to De Vigne, who instinctively followed and answered the Duch-

ess, who kept up the flow of conversation for him; he dared not look into that fair, fond face beside him, nor she into his. Suddenly the clear, cold, hard tones of the Trefusis, at whom, since his last words, he had not glanced, and whom Madame de la Vieillecour had not observed in the demi-lumière of the forest, which was growing dark, now that the sun had set, hissed through the air, arresting all:

“Granville, may I trouble you for a few words before you leave? I thought it was not *comme il faut* for a husband to accept an invitation before his wife’s face in which she was not included!”

Madame de la Vieillecour turned suddenly; the harsh and rapid English was lost on the rest of her party, but she, despite all her tact and high breeding, stared first at the speaker, then at De Vigne.

“Mais!—quelle est donc cette femme!”

He did not hear her; he had swung round, his face, even to his lips, white and livid with passion—passion too deep and concentrated to find for the moment vent in words. Careless of all observers, Alma clasped both hands upon his arm:

“Do not go,” she whispered. “Come with me. Do not stay with her, if you love me!”

For once he was deaf to her prayer; his lips quivered, his eyes filled with lurid fire; it was unutterable torture to have that woman—bold, bad, hateful, all that he knew her to be—stand there and claim him as her husband, with that fiendish laugh and coarse exultation, before the one so unspeakably dear and precious to him—torture that goaded him till he felt rather devil than man. “A few words with me! Yes! we will have a few more words. By Heaven, they shall be such as you will remember to your grave.”

Alma clung to his arm, breathless, trembling, white with fear, as he muttered the words fiercely under his breath

“Granville, Granville, if you love me, do not stay with her! She will madden you, she will kill you, she will make you do something you will repent. For my sake, come, leave her to do and say her worst. She is beneath your vengeance!”

For the first time he was deaf to her entreaties—for the first time he would not listen to her voice. He put her hands off his arm, and answered her in the same low whisper:

“Go, my darling; I will rejoin you. Fear nothing from me; she has already done her worst, and in all I do or say while my life lasts, I shall remember *you*. Go!”

He spoke gently, but too firmly for her to resist him. He turned to Madame de la Vieillecour:

“Allow me, Madame, to speak a few words with this person. I will rejoin you as soon as possible. You do not dine till nine?”

“Not till nine! I will leave a horse for you at the entrance of the Gros Fouteau—au revoir!”

Certain indistinct memories arose in the Duchess's mind of a story her brother, poor little Curly! had told her, long ago, of some unhappy and ill-assorted marriage his idol and his chief, Granville De Vigne, had made. With ready tact she hastened to cover whatever was disagreeable to him, and with a quick guess at the truth, she glanced at Alma's face, and tapped her on the shoulder with her parasol:

“Va t'en petite; il commence à faire froid et ces beaux yeux bleux sont trop chers à trop du monde, pour que je te permette de t'enrhumer.”

They went; a turn in the road soon hid them from sight, and De Vigne and the woman who called herself his wife were left in the twilight, deepening around them. They stood alone the clear soft skies above, the great shadows

of the mighty forest deepening slowly toward them over the velvet turf. For a moment neither spoke. Perhaps the memory was too strong in both of eleven years before, when they had stood thus face to face before the marriage-altar, to take those vows—on one side a lie and a fraud, on the other a curse life-long and inexorable.

Alma knew him aright—this woman did madden him. She had set light to all the hottest passions in him, and they now flared and raged far beyond any power of his to still them. Fiery as his nature was, the hate and anguish to which the past hour had roused him, his loathing for this woman, who only bore his name to dishonor it and only used the tie of wife to torture and insult him, overmastered reason and self-control, and unloosed the bonds of all that was darker and fiercer in his character, which lay unstirred in him as in a lesser or a greater measure in the hearts of all men.

She spoke first, with that coarse sneer upon her face which roused him and stung him more bitterly than anything—the sneer that had been on her lips when she signed her name in the register at Vigne:

“Granville De Vigne, we have met at last! It is twenty years since we parted at Frestonhills. You have found my promised revenge no child’s play, no absurd bombast as you fancied it, eh? I befooled you, I intoxicated you. I led you on, against counsel, reason, prudence. I made you offer me your name, your grand old name which you prized so high! I won you as my husband, *my husband* ‘until death us shall part.’ Do you remember the sweet words of the marriage service that bound us together for life, mon cher? I won you as my husband—I, the beggar’s daughter! I have driven you from your home; I have made the memory of your mother a weight of remorse to you forever; I have cheapened your name, and made it

hateful to you; I have exiled you often from your country; I stand a bar, as long as you and I shall live, to your peace and happiness. You laughed once when I vowed to be revenged on you; you can hardly laugh at it now!"

"Oh! devil incarnate!" burst from De Vigne, all the mad agony in him breaking bounds. "Oh! wretch, divorced in truth from the day we stood together at the altar, evil enough I have done, but not enough to be cursed with you! Have I been so far worse than my fellow-men that I must needs be punished with such cruel chastisement? You were revenged; your lust for position and money made you plan out schemes which—I being drunk with madness—succeeded and triumphed. But hardened as you are, you may tremble at the fiend you raise in me. I tell you in your wildest dreams you never pictured, in his fiercest wrath no mortal ever felt, the hate—the fearful hate—that I now feel for you!"

She laughed again—that coarse, cold, brutal laugh, which thrilled through every inmost fiber of his nature.

"No doubt you do, for the bonds by which I hold you are those that neither church nor law, wealth nor desire, once forged, can break. You want your freedom, Granville De Vigne; but while I live you know well enough that do what you may you will never have it. You want to wash off the stain from your name. You want to go back to your lordly home without my memory poisoning the air. You want your liberty, if only on the old plea for which you used to want all things that were not easy to get, because it is unattainable. Of course you hate me! Perhaps that golden-haired child whom I found you weeping over so pathetically, finding mere love an unprofitable connection, wanted to work on you to put your freedom in *her* hands, and you would fain be quit of me to pay down the price again for a new passion——"

With a fierce spring like a panther, De Vigne seized her by the arm, while even she recoiled from the dark passion lowering on his brow and flaming in his eyes.

“Dare to breathe one word of her again, and I shall forget your sex! Her name shall never be polluted by passing your lips, nor her purity sullied by even a hint from your coarse mind. Let her alone, I tell you, or by Heaven it may be worse for you than you ever dream!”

She quailed before the passion in his voice, the strength of the iron grip in which he held her; but her fiendish delight in goading him to fury outweighed her fear. She laughed again.

“Sullied! polluted! I fancy your protection will do that more completely than my pity. Remember, your love damns a woman almost as utterly as the Roman Emperor’s approach! Remember, the world will hardly believe in the purity and nobility on which it now pleases you to sentimentalize so prettily; it will hardly believe in them from a *lion* like Granville De Vigne, especially when he selects for his inamorata one of Vane Castleton’s forsaken loves!”

An oath, so fierce, that it startled even her, stopped her in her jeering, coarse, and hardened slander. The boiling oil was flung upon the seething flames, lashing them into fury. He was stung past all endurance, and the insult to his strongest and most precious love, the slander of the woman whom he knew as noble and as stainless as any child of man can ever be, goaded him on to madness. Anger, fury, hatred, entered into him in their fullest force; he neither knew nor cared in that moment what he did; the blood surged over his brain, and flamed in his veins like molten fire; he seized her in his grasp as a tiger on his prey.

“Woman, devil, silence! Oh that you were of my

sex, that I could wreak such vengeance on you for your slanderous lies as you should carry with you to the grave!"

Her fierce and cruel eyes looked into his in the dull gray twilight, with that leer and triumph in them with which she gloated over the misery she caused.

"You would kill me if I were a man? I dare say, though I am a woman, you would scarcely scruple to do so if you were not afraid of the law, which is inexorable on murder as on marriage! You would not be the first husband who killed his wife when he fell in love with another woman, though whether it would honor your boasted escutcheon much——"

She stopped, stricken with sudden awe and fear at the passion she had stung and tortured into being. As his eyes looked down into hers with the fury she had roused, and the iron grip of his hands clinched harder and harder upon her, for the first time it flashed upon her that she was *in his power*—the power of the man she had so bitterly wronged, and whom she had now goaded on to reckless fury and maddened despair. She knew his fiery passions—she knew his lion-like strength—she knew his cruel and unavenged wrongs, and she trembled, and shivered, and turned pale in his relentless grasp, for she was in his hands, and had aroused a tempest she knew not how to lay.

"Wretch! fiend! if you tempt me to wash out my wrongs, and slay you where you stand, your blood will be on your own head!"

His voice, as it hissed in the horrible whisper, sounded strange even to his own ear, every nerve in his brain thrilled and throbbed, flashes of fire danced before his eyes, through which he saw cold, cruel, hateful, the face of his temptress and his foe. The cool pale heavens whirled around him,

the giant forms of the forest trees seemed dark and ghastly shapes laughing at his wrongs and goading him to crime. His grasp tightened and tightened on her; she had no strength against him; her life was in his power—that life which only existed to do him such hideous wrong; that life which stood an eternal bar between him and love, and peace, and honor; that one human life which stood barring him out from heaven, and which in one flash of time he could snap, and still, and destroy forever from his path, which its presence so long had cursed.

They were alone, shrouded and sheltered in the dim solitude of the coming night; there were no witnesses in that dense forest, no eyes to see, no ears to listen, no voices to whisper whatever might be done under the cover of those silent beechwood shades.

That horrible hour of temptation!—coming on him when, with every passion stung to madness, his blood glowed ready to receive the poison! The night was still around them, there was not a sound, save the sigh of the forest leaves; not a thing to look upon them, save the little crescent moon and the evening star, rising from the dying sun-rays. Night and Solitude—twin tempters—gathered round him; his heart stood still, his brain was on fire, his eyes blind and dizzy; alone, out of the gray and whirling haze around him he saw that cold, cruel face, with its mocking, fiendish gaze, and clear and horrible the voice of a fell Temptation whispered in his ear, “Her life is in your hands, revenge yourself. Wash out the stain upon your name, win back the liberty you crave, efface the loathsome insults on the woman you love. You hate her, and she stands between you and the heaven you crave—take the life that destroys your own. For your love, she gave you fraud; for your trust, betrayal; for your name, disgrace. Avenge it! It is just! One blow, never heard,

and never known by any mortal thing, and you have freedom back, and love!"

His brain reeled under the horrible temptation; unconsciously his grasp tightened and tightened upon her, too strong for her to have power or movement left. The night whirled around him, the pale-blue skies grew crimson as with blood, the great gnarled trunks of the trees seemed to mock and grin like horrid spirits, goading him to evil, his passions surged in madness through his veins; and clear and horrible he seemed to hear a tempter's voice: "Avenge your wrongs and you are free!" With a cry, a throe of agony, he flung the fell allurements from him, and threw her from his grasp. "Devil, temptress! thank Heaven, not me, I have not murdered you to-night!" She lay where he had thrown her in his unconscious violence, stunned, less by the fall than by the terror of the moment past—that moment of temptation that had seemed eternity to both. She lay on the fresh forest turf, dank with the glittering evening dews, and he fled from her—fled as men flee from death or capture—fled from that crime which had lured him so nearly to its deadly brink—which so nearly had cursed and haunted his life with the relentless terror, the hideous weight of a human life silenced and shattered by his hand, lain by his deed in its grave, sent by his will from its rightful place and presence in the living, laughing earth, into the dark and deadly mysteries of the tomb.

He fled from the hideous temptation which had assailed him in that hour of madness—he fled from the devil of Opportunity to which so many sins are due, and from whose absence so many virtues date. He fled from it; flinging it away from him with a firm hand, not daring to stay to test his strength by pausing in its presence. He fled on and on, in the still gray twilight gloom, through the dense, silent forest, its trembling leaves, and falling dews,

and evening shadows; he fled on under the gaunt boughs and tangled aisles of the woodland; all the darkest passions of his nature warring and rioting within him. Dizzy with the whirling of his brain, every nerve in his mind and body strung to tension, quivering and throbbing with the fierce torture of the ordeal past, he flung himself, half-conscious, on the cool fresh turf with a cry of agony and thanksgiving.

The last faint sun-glow faded from the west, the silver cimeter of the young moon rose over the forest, the twilight deepened, and the night came down on Fontainebleau, veiling town and woodland, lake and palace, in its soft and hallowing light; still he lay upon the turf under the beech-trees, exhausted with the conflict and the struggle of the great passions at war within him; worn out with that fell struggle with Temptation, where submission had been so easy, victory so hard. And as the twilight shadows deepened round him, and the dewes gathered thicker on the whispering leaves, and the numberless soft voices of the night chimed through the silent forest glades, he thanked God that his heart was free, his hands stainless, from the guilt which, if never known by his fellow-men, would yet have haunted him with its horrible presence throughout his life, poisoned the purest air he breathed, turned the fairest heaven that smiled on him into a hell, waked him from his sweetest sleep to start and shudder at the chill touch of remembered crime, and cursed his dying bed with a horror that would have pursued him to the very borders of his grave. He thanked God that for once in his life he had resisted the mad temptation of the hour, and thrust away the devil of Thought ere it had time to fester into Deed; he thanked God that the dead weight of a human life was not upon his soul, to rise and drive him, Orestes-like, from every haven of rest, to damn him in his softest

hours of joy, to make him shrink from the light of heaven, and tremble at the rustle of the forest trees, and quail before the innocent and holy beauty of the earth he had crimsoned with his guilt. He thanked God with passionate gladness and trembling awe at the peril past—that he could meet the innocent eyes of the woman he loved without that secret on his soul—that he could take her hands without staining them with the guilt on his—that he could hold her to his heart without the deadly presence of that crime with which, to win her, he would have darkened earth and burdened both their lives. He thanked God that he could stand there in the solemn aisles of the Forest Temple free at least from the curse of that terrible crime, and feel the soft wind fan his hair, and hear the sweet sighing of the woodland boughs, and look upward to the fair, calm heavens bending over him in the solemn and holy stillness of the night without the myriad voices of the earth calling on him to answer for the crime into which his passions had hurried him, and rising up silent but ruthless witnesses against him—that he could stand there under the fair evening stars, free, saved, stainless from the guilt that had tempted him in the darkest hour of his life, able to look up with a clear brow and a fearless conscience into the pure and holy eyes of night!

PART THE TWENTY-SEVENTH.

I.

FIDELITY.

IT is strange how the outer world surrounds yet never touches the inner; how the gay and lighter threads of life intervene yet never mingle with those that are darkest and sternest, as the parasite clings to the forest tree, united yet ever dissimilar! From the twilight gloom of the silent forest, from solitude and temptation and suffering, from the fell torture of an hour when thought and opportunity, twin tempters, lured him on to crime, De Vigne passed suddenly into the glitter and glow and brilliance, the light laughter and the ringing jests, and the peopled salons of the Diaman du Forêt. From the dense woods and the stirless silence of the night, only haunted by the presence of the woman who had cursed his life and well-nigh lured him to irrevocable and ineffaceable guilt, he came by abrupt transition into a gay and brilliant society, from which all somber shadows were banished, and where its groups, laughing, jesting, flirting, carrying on the light intrigues of the hour, seemed for the time as though no sorrow or suffering, bitterness or passion, had ever intruded among them. Strange contrast! those glittering salons and that dark and deadly solitude of the beech woods of the Gros Fouteau—not stranger than the contrast between the coarse, cruel, hateful face that had lured him to crime and misery in the dense shadow of the forest gloom, and the one, delicate, high-bred, impassioned, with its radiant, earnest regard, and its gleaming, golden hair, on which he

looked as, when away from the gayety and the glitter, the gossip and the mots, the light laughter and the subdued murmur of society, he drew her, after awhile, unnoticed, out on to the terrace which overlooked the wooded and stately gardens of the Diaman du Forêt, where the moonbeams slept on lawn and lake, avenue and statue, in the calm May night, that shrouded Fontainebleau, town and palace and forest, in its silvery mist.

Neither of them spoke; love, memory, thought were too deep and too full in both for words, and neither could have found voice to utter all that arose in their hearts at the touch of each other's hand, the gaze of each other's eyes, the sense of each other's presence.

Dark and heavy upon them was the weight of that past hour. Silent they stood together in the solitude of the night that was calm, hushed, and peaceful, fit for a love either more tranquil or more fully blessed than theirs.

His voice was hoarse and broken as he spoke at last, bowing his head over her.

"You can love me—after this?"

She did not answer him, she only lifted her eyes to his face. By the silvery gleam of the night he could see the unswerving fidelity, after all, through all, promised him for all eternity while her heart should beat and her eyes have life to gaze upon his face.

Words were all too feeble and too chill to thank her; he bowed his head and pressed his lips on hers. Now he knew, never again to doubt it, how unwearingly and how entirely this imperishable and unselfish love that he had won would cling round him to his dying day. The night was still; not a murmur stirred among the trees, not a breath moved upon the surface of the little lake, not a cloud swept across the pale, pure stars, gleaming beyond in the blue heavens. The earth was hushed in deep re-

pose, nature slept the solemn and tranquil sleep which no fret and wrath of man has power to weaken or arrest; while he, the mortal, with human love trembling on his lips, and human suffering quivering in his heart, told in broken earnest words to the woman who would cling to him through all, the confession of that dire temptation which so nearly had ripened into crime. He laid his heart bare to her, with all its sins and weaknesses, its errors and its impulses, fearlessly, truthfully, because she had taught him at last that the love that is love will not shrink from its idol because it finds him mortal, but rather, should his errors be deeper than his fellows, veil them with tender touch, and cling but the firmer and the closer to him in the valley of the shadow of death. He laid his heart bare to her as he had never done to any living thing, knowing that his trust was sacred, secure of sympathy, and tenderness, and pity. He spoke to her as men can never speak to men, as they can seldom speak to women. He told her of that deadly Temptation, that darker nature born in him, as more or less in all, which had slumbered unknown, till opportunity awoke it, and then, aroused in all its force, had wrestled so hardly with all that was merciful, gentle, and better in him. He told her of that fell Tempter of thought which had arisen so suddenly in night and solitude, and whispered him to a deed that would give him back his freedom, avenge his wrongs, and shatter the fetters that weighed him down with their unmerited burden. He told how he had fled from it, how he had conquered it, how he had escaped with pure hands and stainless soul to render thanks to God for his deliverance in the solemn forest-aisles of that temple where man best meets the mystery of Deity—the great temple of the universe which human hands never fashioned, and human creeds, and follies, and priestcraft cannot enter to lower and pollute.

He told her, laying bare to her all that was darkest in him, all the deadly crime begotten in his heart, and so well-nigh wrought by his hand into the black guilt with which one human life stifles and tramples out another. He told her, concealing nothing: then, again, he asked her:

“Can you love me—after this?”

She lifted up her face, that was white as death where the light of the moon shone upon it; and her voice was low and tremulous, yet sustained with the great heroic tenderness that did not shrink from him in his sin, that did not recoil from him in his fell temptation, that forgot and washed out its own wrong in the deep waters of an exhaustless love.

“I shall love you while I have life! I have said it; I can say no more. Let the world condemn you—you are the dearer to *me*! Our love can be no crime in God’s sight.”

He crushed her closer in his arms.

“*Crime!* Great Heaven! *You* are my wife in heart. Such love as yours binds us with stronger force, and consecrates holier tie, than any priestcraft can ever forge. *She* is *not* my wife in the sight of Heaven. Reason, right, sense, justice, all divorced her from the very hour I left her at the altar, my bitter enemy, my relentless foe, who won me by deceit, who would have made my life a hell, who renders me a devil, not a man! *She* my wife! Great God, I renounce her! Let men prate of their laws and of her rights how they choose——”

Alma, as the fierce words were muttered in his throat, clung to him, her voice low and dreamy, like the voice of one in feverish pain.

“She is no wife of yours—a woman that could hate you and betray you! She is no wife of yours—a woman whom you left at the altar! How can they bind you to her?”

"They may!—*I* care not, save that she holds the name that should be yours. This was all that was wanting to fill up the measure of my hate for her. Let fools go babble of her claims upon me if they will. From the hour we parted at the altar I never saw her face until this night; from this night I divorce her before God. She is no wife of mine; her rights are mere legal quibbles, love never forged, fidelity never sanctified, God never blessed them. I claim my heritage of justice as a man—my right to live, to love, to taste the common happiness of my fellows. The very birds around us find their mates. Why are we, alone of all the earth, to be wrenched apart, and condemned to live and die asunder? Why are we, alone, to be forced to surrender all that makes life of joy and value? Alma!—surely we love well enough to defy the world together?"

He paused abruptly, his frame shook with the great passions in him, which were stronger than his strength; the words broke from him unawares—the words that would decide their fate! Her face was flushed to a deep scarlet glow as he looked down on it by the silvery light of the moon, her hands closed tighter upon his, her lip quivered, and he felt her slight, delicate form tremble in his arms. She clung closer to him still, her breathing hurried and low, like broken, rapid sighs; her eyes, humid and dark as night, fell beneath his; that one word, "together," stirred the depths of her heart as the storm-winds the depth of the sea. Two years before she would have scarce comprehended the extent of the sacrifice asked of her more than Mignon or Haidee, scarce known more fully than they all it called on her to surrender. Now she knew its meaning: knew that this man, who was thus pitilessly cursed for no crime, no error, but simply for a mistake—the fatal and irrevocable mistake of early marriage—would

be condemned by the world if he took his just heritage of freedom; knew that, for a divine compassion, an imperishable love, she, who clung to him, would be laid by social law beneath a social ban, would be forbid by it from every sphere and every honor that were her due by birth, by intellect, by right. She knew her sacrifice; she knew that she should decide the destiny of her whole future; and the proud nature, though strong enough to defy both, was one to abhor any free glance, to resent every scornful word: the haughty and delicate spirit was one to feel keenly, yielding one inch of her just place. But—she loved, and the world was far from her; she loved, and her life lay in his. Fidelity is the marriage-bond of God; the laws of man cannot command it, the laws of man are void without it. Would she not render it unto him, even to her grave? Would she not be his wife in the sight of Heaven? Suffering for him would be proudly borne, sacrifice to him would be gladly given. She would have followed him to the darkness of the tomb; she would have passed with him through the furnace of the fires, content, always content, so that her hands were closed on his, so that she had strength to look up to his face.

This is sin, say you? Verily, if it be so, it is the sublimest sin that ever outshone virtue!

He bent his head lower and lower, and his words were hoarse and few.

“Can you love me—enough for this? Alma! we *cannot* part!”

He felt a shudder as of icy cold run through his frame at that last ghastly word, as she lay folded in his embrace. By the white light of the moon he saw the scarlet blush upon her face waver, and burn, and deepen; quick, tremulous sighs heaved her heart; her arms wreathed and twined closer and closer about him; her eyes gleamed with an

undying and eternal love, as they met his own in the pale, soft radiance of the stars.

“We *cannot* part! You are my world, my all! Your will is mine!”

The words were spoken that gave her to him.

The whisper died away, scarce stirring the air; the love that trembled in it was too deep for speech; the fevered flush upon her face glowed warm, then changed to a marble whiteness. She clung to him closer still, and passionate tears, born from the strong emotions of the hour, welled slowly up, and fell from those eyes which she had first lifted to his when she was a little child, flinging flowers at him in the old library at Weivehurst. She loved him, she pitied him; she would forsake all to give him back that happiness of which another's fraud had robbed him. She thought of nothing then save him; and if he had stretched out his hand and bade her follow him into the dark, cold shadows of the grave, she would have gone with him fondly, fearlessly, unselfishly, still thinking only of him; what comfort she could give, what trial share, what pain avert. She loved him. The world, I say, was very far from Alma then—as far as the fret, and noise, and bustle of the city streets are from the fair and solemn stars of heaven.

And in the stillness of the night their lips met. She would give up the world for him.

* * * * *

One oath De Vigne had sworn as he lay on his sick-bed at Scutari, to revenge—before he surrendered himself to any love or any happiness—to revenge on Vane Castleton the insult with which he had outraged every sentiment of delicacy, chivalry, or honor, and brand him, so that the stain could never leave his name, as coward and as scoundrel. He swore afresh to do it before Alma's name was

linked in any way with his own, and the Trefusis's words in the forest that night had spurred his resolve into still steadier purpose. He left the Diaman du Forêt that night, to return straight to England and work out what he held a primary and paramount obligation—the chastisement of the brute insult with which the woman he loved had been outraged. To her he said nothing of his errand, leaving her, indeed, in ignorance that he would not be with her on the morrow; but, ere he quitted Paris by the earliest train in the gray morning, he wrote to her from Meurice's words his honor bade him write—words that he could not find strength to utter while her kiss was on his cheek, while her heart was prisoned against his own. Even to pen them while the dawn was still and cold about him, and he sat in the silence of his own solitary chamber, was hard to him in the rapture that coursed through his veins, and steeped his life in one golden, intoxicating joy, at the single thought, "*She will be mine,*"—cost him a bitter effort in the delirium of an hour in which his one keen, stinging regret, that he must take some sacrifice from the woman who loved him, was lost and forgot, as the throb of departing pain is barely heeded in the delicious languor of the Morphine, that yields us voluptuous ease after long and weary torture.

These were the final words he wrote:

"I must leave you for a few hours—a few days at farthest. One who loved you more unselfishly perhaps than I, bade me in his dying hour try, if I found you again to leave you forever. It is easy to counsel; but, great Heaven! to bid a man renounce the only earthly treasure he has, at the very hour he has recovered it—who could have strength to do it? I, at the least, have none. I am no stoic, no god. Alma!—the man you love is very mortal. Yes—one last word. Do not give yourself to me

without weighing well what it may cost you. Selfish I may be, God knows; though all I ask or seek is the happiness that is the commonest heritage of men, till their wrongs, or their errors, or their follies lose them their birthright forever! But I am not so utterly blind to all that is generous and just as to lead you, for my own sake, to such a sacrifice without bidding you pause to decide whether or no it will be recompensed to you by the sole reward that I can give it—my love and my fidelity. Think of it well; do not let one memory of me sway you in your decision. If it be only your divine pity, your sympathy in my fate, your unselfish wish to give me the joy that my own headlong folly has lost me, that prompts you, do not sacrifice yourself for me. I have brought the burden upon you, it is meet that I should bear it alone, rather than lead you, in your noble generosity, your trustful faith, to a sacrifice for me that in after-life you would look back on with regret. Such a one I could not, I would not, take from you. Weigh it well. Let no thought or pity for me sway you; weigh well, whether your love for me is really great enough to make life with me sufficient compensation for all else. And if, indeed, it *be* great enough for this, your life shall be a heaven upon earth, if man's tenderness can make it so; *my* love, God knows, *you* know, will never swerve!"

II.

NEMESIS.

LORD VANE CASTLETON sat in his chamber in his chambers garnis, in St. James's Street, where he dwelt during the season, when he was not at that "evil cage" of his—

as the old woodsman had termed it—his villa at Windsor, where a woman's hand had struck him for a coward's deed. He sat in his chamber wrapped in his dressing-gown, smoking, breakfasting, reading the papers, and chatting with two of his particular chums, who had dropped in prior to driving down to see the Ascot Cup race run. They were talking of everything under the sun, at least the sun that shone on the West-end: of the chances of the field against the favorite; of the new ballet, and certain ankles that came out very strong in it; of the beauty of Coralie Coquelicot, *alias* Sarah Boggis, a new planet in the orbit of casinos; of the last escapade of that very fast little lionne, Leila Puffdoff; of Sabretasche's marriage, of which, by the way, I heard no less than a hundred and seventy-two *on dits*, the concluding and most charitable one being that of a little lady, well known in the religious as well as in the fashionable world, who whispered that his wife, poor dear innocent thing! had been put hors de vue in Naples by a stiletto, hired for that noble purpose by the Colonel's wealth. No one knew it, of course, but it was but too true, she feared! They were chatting over all the topics of their day as they smoked and breakfasted. Castleton was hardly up to the mark that morning; he was annoyed and irritated at several things: first, that he had serious doubts as to the soundness of Lancer's off-leg, and if Lancer did not come in at the distance winner of the Cup, Lord Vane's prospects would look blacker than would be desirable; in the second, the ministry had behaved with the grossest ingratitude to its staunch ally, the house of Tiara, by refusing him, through his father, a certain post he coveted, a piece of ill-natured squeamishness on their part, as they had but lately given a deanery to his brother, a spirit rather worse than himself; in the fourth, a larger number of little bills were

floating about than was pleasant, and if there was not speedily a general election, by which he could slip into one of those neat little boroughs that were honored by being kept in his Grace of Tiara's pocket, he was likely to be troubled with more applications than he could, not alone meet—of that he never thought—but stave off to some dim future era. Altogether, Castleton was not in an over good humor that morning; had sworn at his valet, and lashed his terrier till it howled for mercy, and found everything at cross purposes and a bore, from his chocolate, which was badly milled, to the news he had lately heard, that “the —— Little Tressillian had come into some money, and had been taken up by old Molyneux,” news which gave him some nasty qualms, for “she’s a confounded plucky, skittish, hard-mouthed little devil,” thought he, “and if the story of that cursed folly of mine ever get afloat, it’ll do me no end of mischief; and if she go and tell people about it—and they’ll listen to her now she’s a little money and Helena has taken her up—I shall never hear the last of it. It would be an infernal case for the papers. She must be put a stop to, somehow—but how?” Which knotty point occupied Lord Vane (who detested Alma with as much vindictiveness as an exceedingly vindictive nature was capable of: first, for her words; secondly, for her blow; and thirdly, for her escaping and outwitting him) more than even the coming trial between Lancer and the field. So altogether Lord Vane was not in a good humor; he swore at his chocolate, he cursed the *Times*—that had just been browbeating the Duke of Tiara out of the ministry—he snarled at his friends, he dressed for Ascot, all in an exceedingly bad humor, and he was not in a better when, on issuing from his chamber to go to the drag that awaited him in the street below, he came suddenly face to face with the man he hated because he was the man that Alma Tressillian loved.

They met abruptly on the stairs as the one was quitting the other approaching, the landing-place—they met abruptly, with barely a foot between them—De Vigne and Vane Castleton; he who had insulted her past all forgiveness, and he who would not have seen a hair of her head injured without revenging it. Involuntarily, they both stood silent for a moment. De Vigne looked at him, every vein in him tingling with passion, as he saw the man who had given him two years of torture—who had insulted the woman he idolized with his brutal love, his loathed caresses—who had put her name into the lips of other men, coupled with lies that leveled her with any other of his worthless fancies. He looked at him, recalling all that she had told him had been poured into her young ear in that horrible hour when she was in Vane Castleton's clutches. He looked at him; his lips pale, and set with a stern, fixed purpose; his large dark eyes burning with the hatred that was rioting within him; his right hand clinching hard on the riding-switch he held, as if he longed to change it into a deadlier and more dangerous weapon. Such insults as Vane Castleton had passed on Alma would have stirred the meekest peace-maker under heaven into righteous wrath, and armed the hand of the most spiritless, if it had had the least drop of manly blood or the least fiber of manly muscle in its veins and sinews. No wonder, then, that De Vigne, quick as David of Israel to wrath, with dark passions born in him from his fathers, the men of the old time, when a stainless shield was borne by an iron hand, and all wrongs were redressed with steel—hot in thought, quick in action, abhorring all that was mean, ungenerous, and cowardly—felt all that was fiercest and most fiery in his nature rise up in its strongest wrath when he stood face to face with the man who had tried to rob him of the woman he loved.

He seemed to hear his hateful love-vows, and Alma's piteous cry of terror and supplication; he seemed to see the loathsome caress with which he had dared to touch her pure soft lips, and the blow which her little delicate fingers had struck him in self-defense; he seemed to feel her struggling, as if for life or death, in the vulture clutches of her hated foe. What wonder that his hand clinched on his riding-whip, as if thirsting for that surer and deadlier weapon with which, in other days, his grandsires had defended their honor and their love!

Vane Castleton was no coward—had he been, the Tiara blood, bad though it might be in other ways, would have disowned him—he was no coward, yet at the eagle eyes that flashed so suddenly upon him, his own fell involuntarily for an instant, but only for an instant. He recovered himself in time to have the first word. He pushed his fine, fair curls off his low, white brow, with a sneer on his lips and in his cold, light eyes:

“De Vigne! My dear fellow, how are you? Didn't know you were in England. Come to rest yourself from that deuced hard campaign, eh?”

“No,” said De Vigne between his teeth, which were set like a lion's at the sight of his foe. “I am come for a harder task—to try and teach a scoundrel what honor and dishonor mean!”

His tones were too significant to leave Castleton in any doubt as to the application of his words. He drew in his lips with a nervous, savage twitch, and his light-blue eyes grew cold and angry. He laughed, with a forced sneer.

“Jealous! Are you come to bully me about that little girl of yours—little—what was her name—Trevanion, Trevelyan, Tressillian—something with a Tre, I know? Really, you will waste your wrath and your powder. I have nothing whatever to do with her; she did not take *me* in, though

every one knows Major De Vigne, wise as he counts himself, fancied that consummate little intrigante a model of fidelity——”

The words had barely passed his lips—he could not finish his sentence—before De Vigne’s grasp was on him, tight, firm, relentless; he might with as much use have tried to escape from the iron jaws of a tiger seeking his prey as from the grasp of the man who loved Alma Tresillian. De Vigne’s face was white with passion, his eyes burning with fiery anger, the wrath that was in him quivering and thrilling in every vein and sinew—to hear her name on that liar’s lips! He seized him in his iron grasp, and shook him like a little dog.

“Blackguard! that is the last of your dastard lies you shall ever dare to utter. You are too low for the revenge one man of honor takes upon another; you are only fit to be punished as one punishes a yelping mongrel or a sneaking hound.”

Holding him there, powerless, in the grip of his right hand, he thrashed him with his riding-switch as a man would thrash a cur—thrashed him with all the passion that was in him, till the little whip snapped in two. Then he lifted him up, as one would lift a dead rat or a broken bough, and threw him down the whole stone flight of the staircase: in his wrath, he seemed to have the strength of a score of giants.

Castleton lay at the foot of the stairs, stunned and insensible. His valet and the people of the house gazed on the scene, too amazed to interrupt it or aid him. His two friends, standing in the street criticising the four roans in his drag, rushed in at the echo of the fall. De Vigne stepped over his body, giving it a spurn with his foot as he passed.

"The devil, De Vigne!" began one of them. "What's up—what's amiss?"

De Vigne laughed—a haughty sneer upon his face:

"Only a little lesson given to your friend, Lord Monckton. Few will disagree with me in thinking it wanted; if they do, I can always be heard of at White's or the United. Good day to you!"

As he walked out into the street to his horse, which was waiting for him, a small, sleek, fair man, with a dandified badine, and a generally showy get-up, altogether in appearance extremely like a hairdresser who passes himself off as a baron, or a banker's clerk who tries to look like a man of fashion—De Vigne's ex-valet and Crimean correspondent, the man Raymond, who had been turned away two years before for reading Alma's letter—came up to him with that deferential ceremoniousness which would have fitted him for a groom of the chambers.

"I beg your pardon, Major, for intruding upon you; but might I be allowed to inquire whether you received a letter from me when you were before Sebastopol?"

De Vigne signed him away with the broken handle of his whip:

"When I discharge my servants, I do not expect to be followed and annoyed with their impertinence."

"I mean no impertinence, Major," persisted the man, "and I should not be likely to intrude upon you without some warrant, sir. Did you read my letter?"

"Read it? Do you suppose I read the begging-letters with which rogues pester me? It is no use to waste your words here. Take yourself off!"

He spoke haughtily and angrily, as he put his foot in the stirrup; he remembered the share Raymond, then in Castleton's employ, had taken in that vile plot against Alma; but he would not degrade her by bringing her name up to

a servant, and lower both her and himself by stooping to resent the mere hired villainy of Castleton's abettor.

"It was not a begging-letter, Major," said Raymond, with a slight smile. "It would have told you something of great importance to you, sir, if you had chosen to read it. I can tell it you still, sir, and it is what you would bid any price to hear."

"Silence!" said De Vigne, as he threw himself across the saddle, turning his head to his own groom. "Ashley, give that man in charge; he is annoying me!"

De Vigne shook the bridle from his grasp, and rode away up St. James's Street.

"I have horsewhipped him, that stain will cling to him forever; but, by Heaven! if I had let my passions loose, I could have killed him," he muttered to himself, as he galloped down Pall Mall, bestowing no more thought on his quondam valet in the passion that still flamed in him despite his vengeance.

He could have slain him, "if God restrained not," and his own principle had not held the curb upon his wrath, as in that horrible night-hour in the forest of Fontainebleau. He could have slain him, the man who would have robbed him of his one earthly treasure; who *had* robbed him of her for two years. He could have slain him, the man who had polluted her name by association with his; who had tried to win her by fraud and insult; who had dared to lure her by the love he knew she bore another into his own cruel and hateful trap; who had dared to touch those young lips, stainless as any rose-leaves with the dew of dawn upon them, with his loathed and brutal caresses. He could have slain him, as Moses slew the Egyptian, in the fiery wrath and hatred of the moment; but he refrained, as David refrained from slaying Saul, when the man who had wronged him lay in his power, sleeping and

defenseless, in the still gloom of midnight. Oh! mes frères, virtue lies not, as some think, in being too pure for temptation to enter into us, but rather in proportion to the strength, the seduction, and the power of the temptation we resist. If there be such to whom like temptation never come, happy for them, their path through life is safe and easy. If they never know the delicious perfume of the rose-garland, they never know the bitterness of the fennel and amaranth; yet closer to human sympathies and dearer to human hearts—nobler, warmer, more natural—is the man who loves and hates, errs, struggles, and repents; is quick to joy and quick to pain; who may do wrong in haste, but is ever ready to atone, and who, though passing through the fire of his own thoughts, comes like gold worthier from the furnace.

Vane Castleton rose from that fall, sunk and degraded in his own eyes forever, with such a hell raging in his own heart as might have satisfied the direst vengeance. He had been thrashed by Granville De Vigne as a hound by its keeper; he knew that stigma would cling to him as long as he lived. Monckton, his valet, his groom, the people of the house, all had seen it; seen him powerless in De Vigne's grasp; seen him held and lashed, like a yelping puppy in a hunting-field. The tale would be told in circles of all classes; it would spread like wildfire. No food so dear to the generality as gossip—above all, gossip spiced with scandal—it would be known in his club, in his clique, all over town. He could not lounge into White's or the Guards' Club without the men knowing he had been horse-whipped by De Vigne—De Vigne, a man too popular and too esteemed for others to discredit or condemn him. Horsewhipped—the blackest, least irremediable stigma that can lie upon a man, branding him a coward whom another has treated as a dog. When he rose, bruised, sore, with

the white foam of anger on his lips, and the lash of De Vigne's riding-switch tingling and smarting on his shoulders, stung at last with the punishment of his own deeds, he—who had prided himself on his vices as other men on their virtues, who had done what he chose without paying or accounting for it to any one, who had earned for himself the sobriquet of "Butcher," for the unscrupulous cruelty with which he cleared everything that lay in his path away from it, heedless of mercy or justice—he had been punished for a lie and an insult—punished with such chastisement as do what he would, would cling to his name, making it shame to him and ridicule to others as long as his life should last. Monckton lost no time in detailing, in that hot-bed of gossipry, a club-room, how "that dare-devil De Vigne pitched into poor Vane. Some row about a woman—I don't know who; but I can swear to the severity of the thrashing; and he kicked him afterward, by Jove! he did. Somebody should send it to the papers!"

Old Tiara, the rascally old man who, Heaven knows, had no business to throw pebbles at anybody—but it is always those who live in the most shattered glass houses that are most busy at that exploit—old Tiara, meeting him in St. James's Street, pushed him aside with his cane.

"I don't know you, sir, and if I did I wouldn't walk the length of the street with you, unless the club windows were empty." Chuckling in himself, too, as he said it; for if his son's humiliation was unpalatable to him as the first of Tiara blood that had ever had such a taint upon it—for if they were bad they were *game*—to humiliate him himself was sweet and highly amusing to the old man, who had learned in youth of Queensberry and Alvanley, Pierrepont and Brummel, and found the same pleasure in a sharp answer as his chaplain would have told him to do in a soft one.

Alma Tressillian was amply revenged. Castleton's debts, his difficulties, his mal odor in general, crowned by the story of his horsewhipping—a horsewhipping that he did not dare *revenge*, because of the evil deed that was the root of the quarrel, would make England too warm, or rather too cold, for him. He could not stay in town, cut by every man worth knowing; all his daily haunts, the club, the Ring, Pall Mall, and St. James's Street, would be filled by old acquaintance, who would either drop him entirely, or shake him off as plainly as they could; every house where he was wont to dine or lounge away his hours would be full of the story that Major De Vigne had thrashed him for an abominable insult to some woman; town would be closed to Castleton as effectually as though everybody had ostracized him. There were only left him casinos and Cafés Régences, sharpers and black-legs, and cut by his own father, and sent to Coventry by his own brothers, he slunk out of London and out of England. He lives at Paris and the Bads, devoting himself, I believe, to extraordinary skillful écarté, to roulette and trente et quarante; his society is not what one of the ducal house of Tiara might reasonably expect, and they tell me there is no more dangerous hand at trapping young pigeons, and fleecing them of all their valuable feathers, than Lord Vane Castleton. It is rather an unworthy office for one of his order, but chacun à leur goût, and a man if he be by nature a coward and a bully, dishonest and dishonorable, will grow up so, whether he was born in an ivory cradle or a strolling player's barn. Nature will out, and it will have the best of the game—unless education be powerful indeed, and so—Vane Castleton, with a great name, a good position, and every chance to make fair running in the race of life if he had chosen, born with the nature of the bully, the coward, and the sharper in him, sank at last, despite all, to their level.

PART THE TWENTY-EIGHTH.

I.

HOW FREEDOM CAME AT LAST.

WHEN De Vigne went back to the hotel, he found a letter from his steward, asking him to go down to Vigne, where business matters required his absolute and personal attention. He read the letter, put it down, and thought a minute over its contents. Vigne was hateful to him; he had never been there since he had quitted it on that fatal New Year's Day which had bound him to Constance Trefusis. Every association connected with it was one of keen and stinging pain, interwoven as they were with the one great irremediable mistake and misery of his life. One place, indeed, was dear and sacred to him—that one green grave under the shadowy elms, where his mother lay; but even there lingered and haunted bitter regret and vain remorse, since it was his folly, his headstrong and willful passion, which had sent her there—the mother whom he had loved so tenderly from the early hours when, as a young boy, he had loved to lean against her knee, sitting under the very shadow of those elms that now sheltered her grave under their fostering foliage. Vigne was full of dark and bitter memories to him; he had not visited it now for eleven long years, exiled from his ancestral home by the gaunt specter of the folly which there had first clung around his life, to bear him such after-fruits of misery. Yet now, whether Alma's love had made life bear a different coloring, he felt a vague wish and longing to see the old home where his careless childhood and his happy youth

nad passed; the home where so many of his forefathers had lived; the home—nearest and holiest tie of all—the home where his mother had died. Alma would not be in England, whither she was coming with the Molyneux, for two days; if he should go and dwell with her in Italy or Southern France, he wished to see the old elm woods of Vigne before he left the country; he wished to see his mother's grave—his mother, the only woman that had ever loved him purely, devotedly, unselfishly, till Alma, poor child! spent all her wealth of love on him. Something impelled him to go down to Vigne as strongly as he had before loathed even the mention of revisiting it. That day he threw himself into the train, and went down to spend twenty-four hours under that roof where he had once slept the sweet, untroubled, dreamless sleep of childhood ere he knew the bitter sorrow and the delirious joys of manhood. They did not know he was coming, and there was no welcome for him, (so best, he could ill have borne it, remembering how he had quitted it;) there was only the flag flying from the west turret because he was returned in safety from the Crimea, and the old lodge-keeper's recognition of him as she looked into his face and burst into tears, for she had worshiped him from his birth, (though De Vigne, in his wayward, mischievous, high-spirited, care-for-nothing childhood, must have been a very troublesome divinity,) and had never thought to see him again before she laid her aged bones to rest. The old familiar things came with a strange thrill of memory upon him. Every turn of the approach—the shadowy double avenue, with its giant elms swaying their massive boughs backward and forward in the sunlight; the great sweep of park and woodland, forest and pasture, stretching away farther than the eye could reach; the clear, sweet ripple of the river rushing under the hawthorns, white as new-fallen snow;

the scamper of the startled hares under the fan-like ferns; the distant belling of the rare red deer, trooping under the arching trees in the blue distance; the grand front of that magnificent pile that his ancestors had left him in heritage, with its stately terraces and turrets, its stretching lawns and gardens—a home too fair to be deserted by its lord and left to silence and to solitude—a home that should have had revelry in its halls and sweet laughter ringing to its stately roof, and love and joy filling its forsaken chambers with their soft silvery chimes—all came back upon him with a very anguish of memory, such a tightening of the heart, as we feel looking on the face of an old friend long parted, and tracing the difference in him and us since the joyous days of old gone by forever. He loved the place, for its own sake; he had been proud of it, for its grand beauty and its historic aroma, when he was yet a child, playing, light-hearted, free, and careless under the shade of its stately woods. He had loved it until it was cursed with the shadow of his unhappy marriage; till the dark memory of the woman who had taken his name haunted and poisoned the air, and filled every well-remembered scene of his home with the relentless ghost, ever pursuing, never eluded, following in the full glare of a noontide sun, as in the voiceless silence of the midnight hours; the spirit of an error in judgment, repented of, but irremediable: no sin, but what costs us dearer as the world goes—a folly.

That ghost pursued him at each step through all the old familiar scenes. He could not enter the great hall where he had seen her the first night she came to Vigne, standing under the gas glare in her dazzling, voluptuous, but ever coarse beauty, with her scarlet wreath over her raven hair, and her scarlet cloak flung half off from that divine form that had won and tempted his eye-love; he

could not mount the wide staircase where he had seen her on his marriage-day, her eyes flashing in triumph under her bridal-veil, that diamond ceinture round her waist that was now turned into gold at the Mont de Piété; he could not enter his home, so fair, so stately, with its wide windows opening on to the sloping lawns and sunny woods beyond, that were all, far as the eye could reach, his; the ghost of the Past—the Past which his own madness had made, and no power of his could now unmake—haunted and pursued him too bitterly! Still less could he have entered his mother's room, undisturbed by his order from the day she died; the chamber sacred to the memory of one who had loved him with so rare, so self-denying, so infinitely patient, unwearying, and tender a devotion; the mother whom the fruit of his own headlong madness had slain from the very depth and strength of her love for her wayward and idolized son.

How fair Vigne looked that day, with the sunlight of the budding summer on its white terraces and green woodlands, all around silent and hushed, save the murmur of the leaves and the soft rush of the river, and the distant belling of the deer that came on the warm, hushed air! It was a strangely sad and silent return—a return for twenty-four hours!—to his noble ancestral home after an absence of eleven years. It was not so that the lords of Vigne in by-gone time came back to their stately manor after fighting a good fight at Acre or Antioch, Worcester or Edgehill, Blenheim or Ramillies. Alone he turned slowly from the house and walked across the park, leaving the grand old pile behind him standing on its knoll of velvet turf, with its famous elms closing around it, and waving their green tree-tops up to the blue clear heavens above—a home worthy of a royal line, forsaken by its master, and left to hirelings and servants in all its fair and stately

beauty—with its legends of honor, and its memories of glory and of greatness. He left the house and walked across the park alone, save an old staghound, well-nigh blind, who had leaped upon him at the first sound of his step, and who now followed him with measured tread across the soft-yielding grass, and under the checkered shade that the great forest-trees of Vigne flung across his path. He walked across the stretching sunlit park, where he had passed so many happy hours as a boy, riding, shooting, fishing, lying under the elm-boughs in the dreamy beauty of such another summer day as this, thinking to himself what a brilliant, glorious, shadowless thing he, De Vigne of Vigne, would make of life when he should grow to man's estate. He walked along, strange commingling thoughts rushing through his brain of his mother, of Constance Trefusis, of Alma Tressillian, of his life, so full as it had been of adventure and excitement, revelry and sport, daring and pleasure—his life so brilliant before that one fatal mistake which marred and darkened it, which now but for that one error would have been so cloudless, crowned as it was with the strong, deep love of manhood, and the passionate devotion, the unswerving fidelity of such a heart as few men win to beat response to theirs. There rose before him the two women who had had so much influence upon his life: the one coarse, insolent, lost to shame, to mercy, and to decency, who had tempted with fifty devils' force in the dark gloom of the Royal Forest, goading him with insult, twitting him with brutal jeer, and luring him to murder; the other delicate, refined, loving, impassioned, with not a thought he might not read in her clear eyes, not a throb of her young heart that did not beat for him, leading him with her soft voice, and her noble trust, and her unselfish love to a higher, fairer, purer life, teaching him faith in human nature. They rose be-

fore him as he walked along, cutting the ferns and grasses as he passed, thought, and memory, and passion all at work, his nature as fiery, restless, wayward, impassioned, as when, years before, under the elms of Vigne, he had wooed the milliner of Frestonhills, the scrub and protégée of old Fantyre. He walked on under the great trees that had watched over his race for centuries, bitter thoughts rising in him at every step, and stung to keener pain rather than softened at the knowledge of the warm, loving heart that was so wholly his, and would be his, let him try it how he might, or ask what sacrifice he would ; walked on until he came to the low ivy-clad fence which parted the churchyard from the park of Vigne, and there, under the great waving elm-trees, tossing their boughs in the summer air, with the lilies and the purple violets clustering round its pure white stone, he saw his mother's grave, the simple headstone bearing her name, lying in the soft summer sunshine, with the birds singing sweet low requiems around, and the church bells swinging slowly through the air, and the great elm-boughs sighing a Miserere for her whose life had been pure as the lilies, and sweet and numble as the violets that clustered round her tomb. And here even the living were forgotten in the memory of the dead, and De Vigne threw himself down beside the grave, calling on her name, as though his voice must waken the woman who had loved his slightest whisper, and never been deaf to any prayer of his. All the love he had borne his mother, all the love she had borne him, rushed upon his mind with an anguish of regret ; if he had listened to her counsel, ever gentle, never ill-timed or unwise, she might have been now living, and the curse of his marriage would not have been on his life, nor its stain upon his name.

If—ah, *if*! How much of our life hinges upon *if*! She

had been very dear to him. The sound of her voice, the tenderness of her smile—the voice that had never spoken harshly to him, that smile that had never failed to welcome him; her gentle nature that his wayward will so often had tried; her unwearying affection, which would so fain have guarded him from every adverse fate; all that had made his mother beloved and reverent and precious to him; all that had made her words have weight with him in his high-spirited, dauntless, self-willed boyhood, when he would listen to no other; all that had made her death a remorse and a regret that a lifetime would not efface—came back upon him in a flood of memories, as he saw the summer sunlight glistening on her grave, and felt the bitterness, the sharpness, the keen, lasting, cruel sorrow of that mystery of Death which wrenches a human life so strangely from those who would so fain hold it back from that dark and ruthless tomb, where no regret, however bitter, can follow to atone for wrong, and no voice, however loved, can hope to waken a response.

The sunshine streamed around him, playing fitfully on the marble as it fell on it through the parted foliage of the overhanging elms. The violets and the lilies of the valley filled the air with their fragrance; the chimes tolled out slowly from the old church tower; all was silent around him, save the carols of the birds and the myriad nameless hushed murmurs and whispers that stir the solitude of a summer's day, with the low and solemn voices of the earth. In the stillness—where no human eyes looked on him—he lay there on the green sods, with the bitterness of a yearning and futile remorse heavy upon him, as he remembered the words of her prophecy, “You will love again, to find the crowning sorrow of your life, or drag another in to share your curse!”

And like the cut of a lancet on fresh-opened wounds fell words spoken beside him :

“You are thinking, Major, of what a mistake you made eleven years ago, and what a fortune you would give to be able to undo it !”

Such an intruder in such a place—coarse insult by his mother’s grave—he, who held his dearest friends at a distance from his deeper feelings, to be broken in upon thus rudely by such an intruder ! He started up, and swung round to meet his ex-valet, Raymond. A deep flush of anger rose over his face ; the man quailed before the fire that flashed from his eyes, and the chill and bitter fury with which his features seemed to change into the set coldness of stone, as he motioned him away, too low and too contemptible a foe to honor by laying his hand upon him.

“Begone, or your insolence will cost you dear. How dare you, you hound, come before me again.”

“Hound ! Humph ! Wasn’t it true what I said, Major ?” asked Raymond, with a smile. “Wouldn’t you give a good deal to anybody who made a free man of you again ?”

Without stopping for a minute to consider what might be the import of his words, stung past endurance by the impudent leer with which the man dared to address him, De Vigne, ever quick to make his muscle do battle for him, and apt to revenge insults as his ancestors had used to do in ages less polite and—perhaps—less cowardly, seized Raymond by his coat-collar—the man’s presence was sacrilege beside his mother’s grave—lifted him up, and flung him across the fence on to the grass and ferns and wild thyme of the churchyard beyond.

“Learn how I bear insult from curs like you ! A month at the treadmill will do you good.”

“Bien obligé, monsieur,” muttered Raymond, as he

gathered himself slowly up from his turfy bed. "Your grasp is no child's play, Major! But listen one moment, sir; do listen. I mean you no insult, by Heaven I don't! I ask, because I can tell you what may be of great importance. If I could make your wife *not* your wife, would you listen to me then, sir?"

Like lightning the blood leapt through his veins at the words "your wife not your wife." The simple thought put suddenly before him brought with it too strong a rush of possible joy, too delicious a vision of what *might be*, for him to hear it calmly or retain his self-possession and reserve!"

"Not my wife!" he muttered, his voice hoarse and stifled in its agony of suspense. "Good God! Have you warrant for what you say?"

"Full warrant, Major. I can do for you what no divorce laws can, thanks to the timorous fools that frame them. If those gentlemen were all fettered themselves, they'd make the gate go a little easier to open. I *can* set you free, but how I won't tell you till we come a little to terms."

Free! Not to Bonnevard, pining in the darkness and wretchedness of Chillon, did freedom, even in its simplest suggestion, bring such a flood of delirious joy as it brought to him. Free! Great Heaven! the very thought maddened him with eager, impatient, breathless thirst for *certainly*, mingled with the cold, chill, horrible doubt that the man was cheating, misleading, and deceiving him. He sprang over the fence to his side, and seized him in a grasp that he would have vainly striven to shake off.

"Great Heaven! If you have truth in what you say, tell me all—all—at once; do you hear?—all!"

"Gently, gently, Major," said Raymond, wincing under the grasp that held him as firmly as an iron vice, "or I

shall have no breath to tell you anything. I can set you free, sir; and I don't wonder you wish to be rid of her! But before I tell you how, you must tell me if you will give me the proper price for information."

De Vigne shook him like a little dog.

"Scoundrel! Do you think I will make a compact with such as you? Out with all you know, and I will reward you for it afterward; out with it, or if it be a hoax it will be the worse for you!"

"But, Major," persisted the man, halting for breath, "if I tell you all first, what gage have I that you will not act on my information, and never give me a farthing?"

"My word!" gasped De Vigne, hurling the answer down his throat. "Do you think me such another scoundrel as yourself? Speak; do you hear? Is she not my wife?"

"No, Major; because she was mine first!"

"*Yours?* Then——"

"Your marriage is null and void, sir."

De Vigne staggered against the fence, dizzy and blind with the delirium of his sudden liberty, the unloosing of those cruel fetters fastened on him by Church and Law, which had clung to him, festering to his very bone, and bowing him down with their unbearable weight. Free! from the curse that had so long pursued him; free from that hateful tie that had so long made life loathsome to him; free from that she-devil who so long had made him shun all of her sex, as men shun poisons they have once imbibed to the ruin of health and strength! Free, his name once more his own, purified from the taint of her claim upon it; free!—his home once more his own, purged from the dark and haunting memories of an irremediable past; free from the bitterness of his own folly, so long repented of in agony and solitude; free to cast from him by law, as he had long done from heart and mind, the woman

whom he loathed and hated; free to recompense with honor in the sight of men the strong and faithful love which would have given up all for his sake, and followed him whithersoever he should choose to lead, content if she were by his side to go with him to any fate.

Dizzy and blind and breathless with the strength of the new-born hope, he staggered against the gray and ivy-tangled wall of the church, and forgetful of Raymond's presence, seeing, hearing, heeding nothing, save that one word—free! the blood flowing with fever-heat through all his veins, every nerve in his body throbbing and thrilling with the electric shock.

He covered his eyes with his hand, like a man dazzled with the sudden radiance of a noontide sun. Then he grasped Raymond's arm again.

“Will you swear that?”

“Yes, sir, on the Bible, and before all the courts and judges in the land, if you like.”

De Vigne gave one quick, deep sigh, flinging off from him forever the iron burden of many years.

“Tell me all, then, quick, from beginning to end, and give me all your proofs.”

He spoke with all the eager, wayward, restless impatience of his boyhood; the old light gleamed in his eyes, the old music rang in his voice. The chains were struck off; he was free!

“Very well, sir. I must go back a good many years, and make a long story of it. Nineteen years ago—'tisn't pleasant to look back so long, sir—Lucy Davis, the handsome milliner of Frestonhills, was a very dashing-looking girl—as you thought, Major, at that time—and I was twenty-two, always weak where women were concerned, and much more easily taken in than I was when I had seen a little more of human nature. My name was Trefusis,

sir, not Raymond at all. I took an *alias* when I entered your service. My father was a Newmarket leg, and he made a good pot of money one way and another; and he had more gentlemen in his power, and more of your peerage swells, sir, under his dirty old thumb, knowing all that he knew, and having done for 'em all that he had done, than you'd believe if I was to swear it to you. He wanted to make a gentleman of me. 'Charlie, my boy,' he used to say, 'with brains and tin you may be as good as them swells any day; they hain't no sort of business to look down on you. I've done dirty work enough to serve them, I reckon.' He wanted to make a gentleman of me, and he gave me a capital education, and more money and fine clothes than any boy in the school. But what's bred in the bone, sir, will come out in the flesh. He went to glory when I was about eighteen, sir, leaving me all his tin to do just whatever I liked with it, and not a soul to say me nay. I soon spent it, sir; every stiver was gone in no time. I bought horses, and jewelry, and wine. I betted, I played; in short, I made ducks and drakes with it in a very few years with a lot of idle young dogs like myself; for though the money would have bought me a very good business, or kept me straight if I'd lived closely and quietly, it wasn't enough to dash with as if I'd had a fortune at my fingers' ends, like yours, sir. But I was a weak young fool in those days, especially weak about women; a handsome woman might turn me round her finger just however she chose, and I'd no strength whatever against her. High and low, Major, men are all alike for the beaux yeux. Jimmy Jarvis—you will have heard of him, sir?—Jimmy was going to have a mill with the Brownlow Boy, at Graystone Green, (perhaps you remember that's only two miles out of Frestonhills,) and I went down with two or three others to see the fight. While I was in Frestonhills, sir,

I saw Lucy Davis in the milliner's shop in High Street, and I fell straight in love with her for her great black eyes and her bright carnation color. I thought I'd never seen anything half so handsome in all my days; and she was a magnificent girl at that time, sir—magnificent without a doubt. If she'd been a duchess's daughter people would have made a fine row about her. I went to church to see her the next day, and bowed to her coming out; and so we got acquainted, sir, and I fell more and more in love, and I wouldn't have stirred from Frestonhills just then to have made my fortune. That was a year after you had left, sir. But I knew nothing about *your* affair, sir, then—trust her!"

(Oh! for the woods of Vigne to hear a valet talk as rival to their lord. Yet in the olden times, in their hot youth and their inflammable passions, I dare say those haughty gentlemen had whispered love-vows to their mothers' fair-faced handmaidens, and looked into the soft brown eyes of Sybil, the forest-ranger's daughter, under the cool shadows of those very elms, long midsummers before; for a young man's taste is easily pleased, and, in youth, we ask no more than the bloom on the lip and the tint on the cheek.)

"I was in love with her; I made myself out a gentleman; I talked grand of marble halls and gorgeous doings, like Claude Melnotte; I bought her presents fit for a countess; I set all my wits to work to win her, and she was a very hard-mouthed, touchy young filly at that time, sir, with a very careful eye to her own interests, and very sure not to do anything till she thought it was for her own advantage. At seventeen, sir, Lucy was a shrewd, calculating hard-hearted woman of the world, an intrigante to do young fellows by the dozen. Half the women that go to the bad, sir, do it because bad is their bias—

because they like vice better than virtue, find it more lucrative, and it pleases their vanity or their avarice. *Love* has very little to do with it, sir; there are bad women as well as bad men, I take it, though the papers and the preachers do term them all innocent angels! Well! I was in love with Lucy, and she thought me a man of fashion and of fortune, and married me; the register is in the church of Frestonhills; you can see it, sir, any day you like. In six months I thought myself a very great fool for having fettered myself—most people think so, sir, some time or other, poor folks even more than rich. Lucy's temper was that of a devil—always had been—and when she found out that all my riches would very soon make themselves wings and flee away, you may suppose it was not softened very much. She helped me to spend my money, sir, for twelve months, leading me about as wretched a life as any woman could lead a man. We lived chiefly abroad, sir, in Paris, and at the German Baths; then the tin was all gone, and Lucy grew a very virago, and, as she had taken me only out of ambition, it was a hard cut to her, I dare say, to find me a mere nobody, with nothing at all to speak of in the way of money, much less of rank. She led me a shocking life, sir. We parted by mutual consent; we could not get on at all, and we hated each other cordially. I left her at Wiesbaden, and went my own ways; she had spent every shilling I had. Some time after, I was fool enough to forge a check; it was found out, and they shipped me off to the colonies, and Lucy was free of me. Some years after, I learnt what she did with herself; at Wiesbaden old Lady Fantyre was staying, rouging, gambling, and living by her wits, as you know she always has done, sir, ever since anybody can remember her. She saw Lucy at the Kursaal, and Lucy had improved wonderfully in twelve months: she could get up a smattering of things very fast; she could

dress well on little or nothing; she had quick wits, and a haughty, defiant, knock-me-down manner that concealed all her ignorance, and carried everything before her. Old Fantyre took a fancy to her; she wanted to have a companion, somebody to make her up well for the evenings and read her dirty novels to her, and humor her caprices, and amuse the young fellows at her little card-parties while she fleeced them at *écarté* or *vingt-et-un*. Lucy seemed just fit for her place. She didn't know she was married; Lucy made herself out an innocent, unprotected girl, whom you, sir, had deserted in an abominable way, and old Fantyre took her into her service. She thought Lucy's handsome black eyes would draw plenty of greenhorns to her supper-table and her cards, and you know, sir, the cards have always been the old lady's bankers, and very good ones, too, or I mistake. Now, Lucy was an uncommonly clever girl, hard-hearted and sharp-sighted; she humored the old woman, she made herself necessary to her, she chimed in with all her sayings, she listened to all her stories, she got into her good graces, and made her do pretty well what she chose. You remember, sir, perhaps, that when you and Lucy parted at Frestonhills she told you she'd be revenged on you. She isn't a woman to *forget*; if a cat scratched her, and she met that cat again ten years afterward, she'd recognize it, and punish it. She'd kept you steadily in her mind, and meant to pay you off for it one fine day, whenever occasion served. She'd set her heart on punishing you the bitterest way she could, and thought, and planned, and schemed till she'd got it all complete. She told Lady Fantyre about you, and she induced her to think that if she could catch you and marry you, what a capital thing it would be for both of them, and how royally they could help you to spend your fortune.

"I must tell you, Lucy had heard that the government

ship that had taken me out to Botany Bay had foundered, and she didn't know that I and a few others had managed to drift in the jolly-boat till an American cruiser picked us up. She thought I was drowned, or else she would have been a vast lot too wide awake to go in for bigamy. Old Fantyre listened, agreed, and took her to England, and introduced her as her niece. There, as you know, sir, you met her, and fell into her toils again. I don't wonder you did not know her; I never should. Years and society and dress, and the education she'd given herself, made such a difference. And how should you think of Lady Fantyre's niece being the same with the milliner girl of Frestonhills High Street? And she was far handsomer then than she had been at sixteen. She caught you, sir--you know how better than I; and at the church her devilish nature came out, and she took the worst revenge she could on you, by proclaiming who she was before all your friends. She knew if you'd only found it out afterward, you'd have hidden it in your own heart; the world would have been none the wiser, and she'd have been cheated of half her revenge. Four years after you had married her, I came to Europe. I'd been staying in the United States, till I thought all fear of my being recognized for that by-gone little affair had blown over; and I went as valet to the Duc de Vermuth. I often wondered what had become of my wife; till one Sunday, when I went to the Pré Catalan, I saw a lady in a carriage, talking and laughing with a number of young fellows round her. She was a remarkably fine-looking woman, and something in her face struck me as like my wife. At that minute she saw me. She turned as white as her rouge would let her, gave a sort of scream, and stared at me. Perhaps she thought she saw my ghost. At any rate, she pulled the check-string, and drove away from me as fast as she could, whether I was in the spirit or

the flesh. Of course I didn't let her give me the slip like that. I followed her to a dashing hotel in the Champs Elysées, and just as she stepped on the pavé, after her grand green and gold chasseur, I stepped up to her and just said, 'Well, old girl, how are you?' Horrible she looked—as if she longed to kill me—and, indeed, I dare say she did. She signed me to silence, and said, 'Not now; come at eight this evening.' I went; and she told me all her story, and offered me, if I would keep quiet and tell nobody she was my wife, to go shares with me in the money you allowed her provided she lived out of England. I thought about it a little. I saw I should get nothing by proclaiming our marriage. I closed with her, and I lived at my ease. But she grew screwy; she didn't pay up to time. She used to anticipate the money, and then defraud me of my share. At last it came into my head, when I heard you had come back from India, to see what sort of gentleman you were, and whether you wanted your freedom bad enough to pay me a high price for it. You required a valet. I entered your service; and when I was sent down to Richmond with the parrot and the books and the flowers, and so on, for that little lady—no, Major, don't stop me, I mean no offense to her, and I must bring her name in to make my story clear—I thought the time would soon come, sir, when you'd give *any* price for your freedom, for I heard plenty of talk, sir, at that time, about you and her; servants trouble themselves more about their master's business than they do about their own. The day you dismissed me from your service, I was going to tell you, if you had only listened. But you were so impatient and so haughty, that I thought I'd let you go on in ignorance, and free yourself, if ever you wanted, as best you might. I entered Lord Vane Castleton's service then. You know he hated you bitterly, because he was gone quite mad about Miss

Tressillian; had set his heart upon her, just because he thought she belonged to you and was not to be had. It seems, sir, he had been very good friends with Lucy in Paris, and he wrote and told her you were in love again, and with somebody who, he thought, didn't know you were married, and that if she wished to put a stop to it, she should come over and tell Miss Alma. Over she did come, saw him first, and then went to St. Crucis; and after she'd been—I didn't see her, and didn't know she was in London—he sent me to bring Miss Tressillian to Windsor, while you were sitting in court-martial on Mr. Halkett. It was a dirty job, sir, I know, and a rascally one. Don't look at me so fiercely, Major, for God's sake. I am sorry I did it now, for she'd sweet blue eyes, that little lady, and I was never quite easy till I knew she'd got out of Lord Vane's clutches; she must have done it by some miracle, for no other woman ever got away from him before. Then you went to the Crimea, and Lucy paid worse and worse; to be sure, she gave me that diamond ceinture she wore on her wedding-day, your present to her, sir, I think, and it was good for 1000*l.*, but they wouldn't give me so much at the Mont de Piété, and I owed more than half what they did give me. At last I thought I would try you again, if only to spite Lucy, who was living in splendor and grudging me every shilling. I wrote to you at the Crimea—I called to speak to you at Mivart's—finally, I tracked you here. Now I've told you all my tale, Major. I know you well enough to know your word is as sure a bond as another man's check; and if you'll go with me, sir, to Trinity Church, Frestonhills, I'll show you the register of my marriage, sir, which makes yours null and void."

De Vigne leant against the old gray stone; his face was white with the intensity of the sudden joy, his breathing came short and thick, his eyes were dark as night, with the

apture thrilling through every nerve, till it seemed to stifle him in its intensity; his strong frame trembled like a woman's. The ecstasy of that hour! No criminal, condemned to death and suddenly reprieved, felt the warm rush of fresh air welcoming him as he issued—a free man—from the darkness of his prison-cell of doom, with deeper, more bewildering joy, than he realized and welcomed his liberty from the festering and bitter chains that so long had dragged upon him—his liberty from the weary weight, the repented folly, the bitter curse of an Early Marriage.

He was silent, breathing fast and loud, struggling to realize this possibility of freedom. Then—he threw back his head with a proud joyous gesture; he looked up to the glad summer sun shining above his head; he drew in with a deep long breath the free sweet air that streamed around him. He turned his eyes upon the man, flashing with their old, proud, brilliant, shadowless light.

“Right! I would pay *any* price for freedom. Let us go at once. I will not lose an hour—a moment!”

He went—and the sunlight played over his mother's grave, seeming to linger fondly there, touching the fragrant violets to a deeper blue and the lilies to a purer silver. It was pitiful that the gentle and loving heart, stilled there forever, could not awake to throb in unison with her son's joy, and know his freedom from that deadly curse whose blow had sent her to her tomb! Her love had been with him in his grief; it was cruel that her love could not be with him in his joy. Cruel? ah, truly!—on earth there is no more bitter thing than the death that is in the midst of life.

* * * * *

Frestonhills, unchanged, lay nestling among the green pastures and fresh woods of Berkshire, and all the old familiar places struck strangely on him as he passed them

There flowed the silver Kennet, bright and rapid as of old, rushing on its swift sunny way under the graceful bridges, and past the wild luxuriant hedges, and through the quiet, silent country towns and villages. There, on its banks, were schoolboys lying among the purple clover and under the fragrant hawthorns, as poor little Curly had done long years ago. There were the dark palings, and the great forest-trees of the park of Weivehurst, long changed to other hands before its rightful owner was laid to rest, his grave marked only by a simple wooden cross, under the southern skies of Lorave. There, against the blue heavens, rose above its woods the gray pinnacles of the old house where Alma Tressillian had made the roof ring with her childish laughter, playing on the dark galleries, or out under the golden laburnums that flung the same shadows on the lawn, now, as then. There was the old Chancery, its gable roofs and its low ivy-grown walls, as he passed. A lady glanced up, gardening among her geraniums and heliotropes—it was Miss Arabella—the ringlets very gray now. A little farther on, in the old playing-field, there were the wickets, and the bats, and the jumping poles, and four or five boys, in their shirt sleeves and their straw hats, enjoying their half-holiday, as we had done before them. So life goes on; when one is bowled out, another is ready to step into his shoes, and, no matter how many the ball of death may knock over, the cricket of life is kept up the same, and players are never wanting.

The register lay on the table under the arched Norman window of the vestry of the church where, twenty years before, we had fidgeted through the dreary periods of the rector's cruel sermon full an hour long, and cast glances over our hymn-books at the pastrycook's pretty daughters.

The great old register, ponderous and dusty, lay on 'he

table, the sunbeams from the stained glass above falling on its leather binding, and its thickly-written leaves, full of so many records of man's joy and sorrow, crowded with so many names that now were empty sounds, penned by so many hands that were now crumbled to dust under the churchyard sods near by. The great register lay on its table in the dark, quiet, solitary vestry—the last he had seen was the one in which he had signed his doom, eleven years before, in the church at Vigne. The old sexton unlocked the book, and with shaking infirm hand turned over the leaves one after the other. De Vigne leant against the table, watching for the entry, his breath short and labored, his pulse beating with fever-heat, a mist before his eyes, a great agony of dread—the dread of *deception*—tightening his heart and oppressing him to suffocation. If the man's story were not true!—if this, too, were a hoax and a fraud! Breathless, trembling in every limb with fear and hope, he bent over the book, pushing the old man's hand away; his agony of impatience could not brook the slow and awkward fumbling of leaf after leaf—by the palsied feebleness of age. He thrust the pages back one after another till he reached the year 18—. Entry after entry met his eye: from lords of the manor, their ancestral names dashed across the page; from poor peasants, who could only make their mark; from feminine signatures, trembling and illegible, marriage after marriage met his eager glance, but not yet the one which was to loosen his fetters and set him free. He turned the leaves over one after the other, his heart throbbing thick with wild hope and irrepressible fear. At last the setting sun, shining in through the rich hues of glory, the rubies and the ambers, the heads of saints, and the golden scrolls, and the blazoned shields on the stained window above his head, flung radiant colors on one dim yellow sheet, illumining with its aureole of light

the two signatures he sought—the words that gave him ransom—the names that struck off his chains—

CHARLES TREFUSIS.

CONSTANCE LUCY DAVIS.

And as his eyes fell upon the page that freed him from the wife that had so long cursed his life, and stained his honor, and made his name abhorrent in his sight, because she bore it, De Vigne staggered forward, and, flinging the casement open, leant out into the calm, fresh evening, stunned by his sudden deliverance as by some mortal blow, and gasping for breath, while the warm westerly wind swept over him, like a man who has escaped from the lurid heat and stifling agony of fire into the pure, sweet air of a breaking dawn.

He was FREE! The life that he had so madly sought to spend like water, and fling off from him as an evil too bitter to be borne, among jungles of Scinde and on the steppes of the Crimea, was once more rich, and precious, and beloved;—he learned at last what his wayward nature had been long ere it would believe, that the fate we deem a curse is oftentimes an angel in disguise, if we wait patiently for the unfolding of its wings from the darkness that enshrouds them.

PART THE TWENTY-NINTH.

I.

VALETE.

Two days after there was a fête given at Enghein, at the princely maison de plaisance of an English earl—a stout, bloated old man, lavish as the wind, and rich as a Russian, who, consequently, had all the most seductive Parisiennes to make love to him; Dalilah caring very little who her Samson be, provided she can cut off his locks to her own advantage. The fête was of unusual magnificence, and the empress of it was “the Trefusis,” as we call her, “that poor fellow De Vigne’s wife—a very fast lot, too,” as men in general called her—“Ma Reine,” as the Earl of Morehampton called her, in that pleasant familiarity which the lady in question ever readily admitted to those good friends of hers, who emptied half the Palais Royal upon her in bijouterie, jewelry, and other innocent gifts of amity—a familiarity that always stopped *just* short of Sir Cresswell’s court, over the water. The Trefusis reigned at Enghein, and remarkably well she looked in her sovereignty, her jeweled ivory parasol handle for her scepter, and her handsome eyes for her droit de conquête. Only three nights before she had lain on the dank grass in the Royal Forest, where the mad agony of a man, whom she had goaded and taunted to the verge of the darkest and most hideous guilt that can stain a human soul, had flung her off, bidding her thank God, not him, he had not murdered her in that ghastly temptation; hurling her from him in delirious violence, lest in another

moment of that fell struggle crime should stain his life, and his grip should be upon her throat—her death lie at his door—her blood be red upon his hand! Only three nights before! but to-day she sat under the limes at Enghein, the very memory of that hour cast behind her for evermore, save when she remembered how she had taunted, how she had jeered, how she had triumphed—remembered in gloating glee, for her victim could not escape her snare! The Trefusis had rarely looked better—never felt more secure in her completed vengeance upon De Vigne, her omnipotent sway over Morehampton, and all her lordly claque, than now. She was beautifully rouged, the carnation tint rich and soft, and defying all detection; her black Chantilly lace swept around her superb form; a parure of amethysts glittering in her bosom, haughtily defiant, magnificent, though coarse if you will, as she drove down to the villa in the Earl's carriage, and reigned under the limes in dominance and triumph that day, as she had reigned since the day she had first looked at her own face in the mirror, and sworn by that face to rise and to revenge.

In brilliant style Morehampton had prepared to receive her, for he admired the quasi-milliner of Frestonhills more than anything else, for the time being, to the extreme rage of La Baronne de Bréloques, Mademoiselle Celeste Papillon of the Français, and many other fair Parisiennes. There was the villa itself, luxurious as Eugène Sue's; and there were grounds with alcoves, and statues, and rosieries à ravir, as Mademoiselle Celeste phrased it; there was a "pavillon des arts," where some of the best cantatrici in Paris sang like nightingales; there was a déjeuner, with the best cookery in France—who can say more? there were wines that would have made Rahab or Father Mathew swear, with Trimalchio, "*Vita vinum est*;" there

were plenty of men, lions, *littérateurs*, and *milors* Anglais who were not bored here, because they could say and do just what they pleased, with no restraint upon them whatever. And there were plenty of women, (very handsome ones, too, for the Earl would never have wasted his invitations on plain faces,) who smoked, and laughed at grivoises tales, and smiled at very *prononcée* flattery, and drank the *Johannisberg* and the *Steinberg* very freely for such dainty lips, and imitated us with their *tranchant* manners, their slang, and their *lionneism* in many things, except their *toilettes*, which were exclusively feminine in their brilliance and voluminous extent—among them the *Trefusis*, reigning like an empress, to the dire annoyance of most of them, especially to *Mademoiselle Papillon*, who, being a very dashing young actress, accustomed to look upon *Morehampton* as her own especial spoil, did not relish being eclipsed by the Englishwoman's superb person and bold black eyes.

The *déjeûner* was over, during which the noble Earl, as his friends in the Upper House termed him when they were most politely damning him and his party, was exceedingly devoted to the *Trefusis*, and thought he had never seen anything finer than those admirably-tinted eyes and beautifully-colored cheeks. He did not care for your nymphs of eighteen, they were generally too shy and too thin for his taste; he liked *bien conservé*, full-blown, magnificent roses, like the ex-milliner, who certainly made herself more amiable to him than those who have only heard of her in the studio at *St. Crucis* and the Forest of *Fontainebleau* can well imagine. The *déjeûner* was over, at which the *Trefusis* had reigned with supreme contentment, laughed very loudly, and drank champagne enough for a young cornet just joined; at which old *Fantyre* enjoyed the *pâtes de foie gras* and other delicacies like an old

gourmette as she was, told dirty stories in broad Irish-French, and chuckled in herself to see gouty old Morehampton playing the gallant; and at which Mademoiselle Papillon could have fainted with spite, but not willing to give the detested Englishwoman so enormous a triumph, resisted her feelings with noble heroism.

The déjeuner was over, and the guests had broken up into groups, dispersing themselves over the villa and its grounds. The Trefusis and Morehampton took themselves to the "pavillon des arts;" but, after hearing one song from the "Traviata," "Ma Reine" was bored—she cared nothing for music—and she threw herself down on a seat under some linden-trees to take ice, listen to his private band, which was playing close by, and flatter him about his new barouche, which she knew would be offered her as soon as she had praised it. It was by such gifts as these she managed to eke out her income, and live au premier in the Champs Elysées. Morehampton flung himself on the grass at her feet, forgetful of gout and lumbago; other men gathered round her; she was a "deuced fine woman," they thought, but, "by George! they didn't envy De Vigne." The band played valse and Béranger airs; the Earl was diverted between admiration of the black eyes above and rueful recollections of the damp turf beneath him; Mademoiselle Papillon made desperate love to Leslie Egerton, of the Queen's Bays, but never missed a word or a glance that went on under the lime-trees for all that, with that peculiar double set of optics and oral nerves with which women seem gifted. Very brilliant, and pleasant, and lively, and Watteau-like it all was; and, standing under an alcove at some little distance, mingling unnoticed with the crowd of domestics, stood Raymond, *alias* Charles Trefusis, come to claim his wife, as he had been bound by De Vigne to do on receipt of De Vigne's

reward—none the less weighty a one, you may be sure. because the man had been given only a promise, and not a bond. De Vigne's honor in those matters was in exact inverse ratio to the world's.

“By Jove! sir,” the fellow whispered to me—I had come with him to see he kept good faith, and did not give us the slip—“just look at her, what a dash she cuts, and what a fool she's making of that old lord! That's Lord Morehampton, ain't it, sir? I think I remember him dining once with Lord Vane in Pall Mall. He's a regular martyr to the gout. I wonder he likes that damp grass. I suppose Lucy's bewitched him. Isn't she a wonderful woman, sir! Who'd think, to see her now, that she was ever the daughter of a beggar-woman, and a little milliner-girl at Frestonhills, making bonnets and dresses for parsons' wives!”

I looked at her as he spoke, and, though it seemed wonderful to him, it did not seem wonderful to me. Lucy Davis's rise was such a rise as Lucy Davis was certain to make, favored by opportunity as she had been—neither more nor less of a rise than a hard-headed, unscrupulous, excessively handsome woman, determined to push her way, and able to take the best possible advantage of every turn of the wheel, was pretty sure to effect. She could not make herself a gentlewoman—she could not make herself a woman of talent or of ton. That she was not a “lady,” Sabretasche's sure perception had told him long, long ago, and his daughter's delicate taste had known still more certainly later on: she was merely what she had been for the last ten years, with the aid of money, dress, and assurance—a dashing, handsome, skillful intrigante, whose magnificence of form made men forget or never notice her shortcomings in style, and whose full-blown beauty made them content with the paucity of ideas and the vulgar harshness

of tone in the few words which ever passed the Trefusis's lips, which were too wise to essay often that sure touchstone of mind and education—conversation.

Raymond stood looking at her, a cunning, malicious gleam of satisfaction in his little light eyes. His wife had made a better thing of life than he had done; he detested her accordingly; he had many old grudges to pay off against her for bitter, snarling words, and money flung to him, because she feared him, with a sneer and an invective; he hated her for having lived in clover, while he had not even had a taste of luxury, save the luxuries of flunkeyism and valetdom, since they parted, and he enjoyed pulling her up in the midst of her glories with such malignant pleasure as was natural to his disposition. She had married him at two-and-twenty; she had made him repent of it before the honeymoon was out; she had played her cards since to her own glorification and his mortification: there was plenty in all that to give him no little enjoyment in throwing her back, with a jerk, in the midst of her race. He stood looking at her with a peculiar smile on his lips. I dare say he was thinking what a fool he had been to fall in love with the black-eyed milliner of Frestonhills, and what a far greater fool still was his lordship of Morehampton to waste so much time and so much money, such wines, such jewelry, and such adoration, on this full-blown rose, whom no one ever tried to gather but, somewhere or other, they scratched themselves on her dextrously moss-nidden thorns.

At last the Trefusis, tired of ices, cancons, and Morehampton's florid compliments, which I should think must have been most profoundly tiresome, (though all flattery is welcome to some women, as all bonbons to children, whether of sugar or chalk, lemon-juice or citric acid,) rose to go into the house and look at some rare Du Berri vases

that had belonged to Madame de Parabère, and for which the Earl had given a fabulous price, and as foolish a one as our ancestors used to give for tulip-roots. The Trefusis rose, Morehampton sprung to his feet with boyish lightness and gallant disregard of the gout, and then her husband stepped forward; and I doubt if Nemesis, though she often took a more imposing, ever assumed a deadlier guise than that of the *ci-devant* valet!

The Trefusis gave an irrepressible start as she saw him; the color left her lips—her cheeks it could not leave. She began laughing and talking to Morehampton hurriedly, nervously, incoherently, but there was a wild, lurid gleam in her eye, restless and savage. Her husband touched his hat submissively, but with a queer smile still on his face.

“I beg your pardon, my lord, but may I be allowed to relieve you of the escort of my wife?”

Morehampton twisted himself round, stuck his gold glass in his eye, and stared with all his might; the men crowded closer, stroking their moustaches in curiosity and surprise; the English women, who could understand the speech, suspended the spoonfuls of ice that were en route to their lips, and broke off their conversation for a minute; the Trefusis flushed scarlet to her very brow, her eyes scintillated and glared like a tigress just stung by a shot that inflames all her savage nature into fury—ever ready with a lie, she clung to Morehampton’s arm:

“My dear lord! I know this poor creature very well; he is a lunatic—a confirmed lunatic—a harmless one quite; but it is one of his hallucinations that every woman he sees and admires is his wife, who really, I believe, ran away from him, and his brain was turned with the shock of her infidelity. He is harmless, as I say—at least I have always heard so—but pray tell your servants to take him away. It is very horrible!”

It was an admirably-told falsehood—told, too, with the most natural ease, the most natural compassion imaginable—and passed muster with Morehampton, who signed to two of his lacqueys.

“Seize that fellow and turn him out of the grounds. How did he get in, Soames? Go for some gendarmes if he resist you,” said the Earl, aloud; then bent his head, and added, (*sotto voce*), “How grieved I am, dearest, that you should be so absurdly annoyed. What a shockingly stupid fellow! Brain turned, you say—and for a *wife*?”

But Raymond signed off the two footmen, who were circling gingerly round him like two dogs round a hedgehog, not admiring their task, having a genuine horror of lunacy, and being enervated, probably, by the epicureanisms of plush-existence.

“That is a pretty story, my lord, only, unfortunately, it isn’t true. Ben travato—but all a humbug! I am as sane as anybody here; much too sane to have my brain turned because my wife ran away from me. Most men would thank their stars for such a kind deliverance! I am come to claim mine, though, for a little business there is to be done, and she is on your arm now, my lord. She married me nineteen years ago, and made me repent of it before a month was out.”

“Dear, dear! how absurd, and yet how shocking! Pray send him away,” whispered the Trefusis, clinging to the Earl’s arm, looking, it must be confessed, more like a devil than a divinity, for her lips were white and twitching savagely, and the spots of rouge glared scarlet.

“Do you hear me, fellows? Turn that impudent rascal out!” swore Morehampton.

“That fellow’s wife! Why, she’s De Vigne’s wife. Everybody knows that!” muttered Leslie Egerton, sticking his glass in his eye. “Saw him married myself, poor wretch!”

‘Mais qu’est ce que c’est donc?’ asked Mademoiselle Papillon, edging herself in with a dim delicious idea that it was something detrimental to her rival.

“Kick him out!” “Turn him out!” “An escaped lunatic!” “Impertinent rascal!” “Ma foi! qu’a t-il donc!” “Mais comme c’est extraordinaire!” “Dieu! qu’est ce que cela veut dire!” resounded on all sides from Morehampton’s guests, and the Trefusis’s adorers.

“Major De Vigne’s wife?” repeated Raymond. “No, she’s not, gentlemen; he knows it now, too, and thanks Heaven for it. She married me, as I say, nineteen years ago; more fool I to let her. Ten years ago she married Major De Vigne. So you see, my lord, she’s my wife, not his, and I believe what she has done is given a nasty, coarse, impolite term by law. What I tell you is quite true. Here’s Captain Chevasney, my lord, who will tell you the same, and tell it better than I. Come, old girl, you’ve had a long holiday; you must come with me and work for a little while now.”

He spoke with a diabolical grin, and, thus appealed to, I went forward and gave Morehampton as succinctly as I could the outlines of the story. The Trefusis’s face grew gray as ashes, save where the rouge remained in two bright crimson spots fixed and unchanged, her eyes glittered in tiger-like fury, in cold, hellish wrath, and her parasol fell to the ground; its ivory handle snapped in two as her hands clinched upon it, only with a violent effort restraining herself from flying at mine or her husband’s throat. For the first time in her life, the clever Greek had her own marked card turned against her; her schemes of malice, of vengeance, of ambition, were all swept away like cobwebs, never to be gathered up again. De Vigne was free, and she was caught in her own toils!

She swung round, sweeping her black Chantilly lace

round her, and scattering her sandal-wood perfume on the air, laughing:

"And do you believe this cock-and-bull story, Lord Morehampton?" Her voice came out in a low, fierce hiss, like a serpent's, while her large, sensual, ruby lips curled and quivered with impotent rage. "Do you believe this valet's tale, bribed by a man who would move heaven and earth to prove his lawful marriage false, and the corroborating story told so glibly by a gentleman who, though he calls himself a man of honor, would swear black were white to pleasure his friend?"

"Come, come there, my lady!" laughed Raymond. "Wait a bit. Don't call us bad names. You can't ride the high horse any more like that, and if you don't take care what you say we'll have you up for libel; we will, I assure you. Come, you used to be wide awake once, and if you don't keep a civil tongue in your head it may be the worse for you."

"Lord Morehampton, will you endure this? I must appeal," began the Trefusis, turning again to that noble Earl, who, with his double eye-glass in his eye, and his under lip dropped in extreme astonishment, was too much amazed, and too much annoyed, at such an unseemly and untimely interruption to his morning fête to take any part in the proceedings whatever. He was a little shy of her, indeed, and kept edging back slowly and surely. She was trembling now from head to foot with rage at her defeat, terror for the consequences of the *esclandre*, mad wrath and hatred that her victim had slipped from her fetters and that De Vigne was free.

Her husband interrupted her with a coarse laugh, before she could finish.

"You appeal to your cavalier servente, madame? Oh! if my Lord Morehampton likes to keep you, I have no ob-

jection; it will take a good deal of trouble off my hands, and I only wish him joy of his bargain. And next time, Lucy, make sure your chickens are hatched before you count them!"

At so summary a proposition from a husband, the Earl involuntarily drew back, blank dismay visible on his purple and supine features. The offer alarmed him! The Trefusis was a deuced handsome woman, but she was a deuced expensive one too, thought he, and he hardly desired to be saddled with her pour toujours. Added to his other expenses, for a permanence, she would go very near to ruin him, not to mention tears, reproaches, and scenes from many other quarters; and "she is a very vixen of a temper!" reflected the earl, wisely, as he edged a little farther back, and left her standing alone—who is not alone in defeat?

The Trefusis looked round on everybody as they hung back from her, leaving a clear space about her, with a searching, defiant glance, her fierce, black eyes seeming to smite and wither all they lit on; great savage lines gathered round her mouth and down her brow, that was dark with mortification and impotent chained-up fury. She glanced around, her lips twitching like a snared animal's, her face ashy gray save where the crimson rouge burned in two oval patches, flaring there like streaks of flame, in hideous contrast to the deathly pallor of the rest. She was defeated, outdone, humiliated; the frauds and schemes of twenty years fruitless and unavailing in the end; her victim free, her enemies triumphant! She glared upon us all till the boldest women shrank away terrified, and the men shuddered as they thought what a fiend incarnate this their "belle femme" was! Then she gathered her rich lace around her. To do her justice, she was game to the last!

“Order my carriage!”

She was beaten, but she would not show it; and to her carriage she swept, her massive Chantilly gathered round her, her silks rustling, her perfume scenting the air, her demie traine brushing the lime-blossoms off the lawn, her step stately and measured, her head defiantly erect, leaving on the grass behind her the fragile ivory handle, symbol of her foiled vengeance and her impotent wrath—her dethroned sovereignty. There was a moment’s silence as she swept across the lawn, her tall chasseur, in his dashing green and gold uniform, walking before her, her two footmen with their long white wands behind, and at her side, dogging her footsteps, with his sneer of retribution and his smile of vengeance, the valet who had claimed her as his wife. There was a moment’s silence; then the tongues were loosened, and her friends, and her rivals, and her adorers spake.

“Gad!” quoth my Lord of Morehampton, “she looked quite ugly, ’pon my soul she did, with those great rouge spots on her cheeks. Curse it! how deuced shocking!”

“Mon Dieu, milor,” sneered Mademoiselle Papillon, “je vous félicité sur votre nouvelle amie, peut-être vous voudriez avoir le plaisir de prendre la rôle du *troisième* mari!”

“Better go and be Queen of the Greeks—deuced sharp woman!” said Lee Philipps.

“Always said that creature was the very devil. Plucky enough, though!” remarked Leslie Egerton, with his cigarette in his teeth. “What a jolly thing for De Vigne! Prime, ain’t it?”

“The biter bit!” chuckled old Fantyre. “Well she was very useful to me, but she was always a devil, as you say, Leslie; horrid temper! She should have managed her game better. I’ve no patience with people who don’t

make sure of their cards. Dear, dear! who'll read me to sleep of a night?"

And the others all crowded round me, dirty old Fantyre peering closest of all, with her little, bright, cunning, inquisitive eyes.

"Come, tell us, Chevasney, is it true?"

"I say, old fellow, what's the row?"

So the world talks of us, either in our sorrows or our sins! They were full of curiosity, annoyance, amusement—as it happened to affect them individually; none of them stopped to regret the great lie, to remember the great wrong, to grieve for the debased human nature, and the bitter satire on the Holy Bond of Marriage, that stood out in such black letters in the new story which I added to their repertoire of scandâles. Cancans amuse us; we never stop to recollect the guilt, the sorrow, or the lie that must give them their foundation-stone, their coloring, and their flavor. Mademoiselle Papillon was nearest of all to the moral of the story, when she shrugged her little plump shoulders:

"Mon Dieu! Qui voudrait se marier! Dans celle loterie bizarre qui peut espérer d'éviter la chicane? En amour on est un ange—en mariage un démon. Nul homme sage ne l'essayerait!"

* * * * *

The summer sunshine that lit up the sparkling wines, and glittering toilettes, and gorgeous liveries of the fête at Enghein, shining on the Trefusis's parure of amethysts and on the rich scarlet rouge of her cheeks—that flag of defiance that flaunted there in defeat as in victory!—shone at the same hour through the dark luxuriant foliage of the chestnuts at St. Crucis, on the lilac-boughs heavy with massed blossom, on the half-opened rosebuds clinging round the woodwork of the old brown walls and on the swallow's

nest nestled under the thatch of the eaves. A warm amber light, the light of the coming summer, lay on the earth, and in it the gnats were whirling at their play, and the early butterflies fluttering their saffron wings. The afternoon was perfectly still, no sound breaking in upon its silence except now and then the song of a bird in the branches, the lazy drone of a bee among the lilacs, or the distant chime of a church clock afar off ringing the quarters slowly and softly in the summer air. And out on the dark oaken sill of the window, drooping her head upon her hands, while the light flickered down upon her hair through the network of the leaves, leant a woman, heedless, in the depth of her own thought, of the play of the south wind or the songs of the birds, as both made music about her among the chestnut-blossoms and the lilac-leaves without. Alma had been but a few hours in England, and had come at once to her old home, endeared to her by a thousand associations. She was alone, nothing near her save the bee droning in the cup of the early rose, or the yellow butterfly that settled on her hair unnoticed. Her head was bent, resting on her hand; her face was very pale, save when now and then a deep warm flush passed over it, suddenly to fade again as quickly; her eyes were dark and dreamy, with a yearning tenderness; and on her lips was a smile, mournful yet proud, as, half-unconsciously, they uttered the words of her thoughts aloud: "I will not leave thee, no, nor yet forsake thee. Where thou goest I will go; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God!"

They were the words of an oath—an oath to whose keeping she would dedicate her life, even though, to so keep it, that life would be in the world's eyes condemned and sacrificed. She leant there, against the dark woodwork, alone, the silence unbroken that reigned about her, save when the wind swept through the fragrant branches

above, or the rush of a bird's delicate wings cleft the air. Suddenly—in the stillness, while yet it was so distant that no other ear could have heard it—she caught a footfall while its sound was so faint that it did not break the silence, as the spaniel catches the step of his master while yet afar off; she lifted her head with a wild, eager grace that was natural to her as is its freedom to a flower, her eyes growing dark and humid in their expectancy and their great joy, her color changing swiftly with the force of a joy so keen that it trenched on anguish, with the hot vivid flush of a love strong as the life in which it is imbedded and entwined. Then, with a low, glad cry, she sprang, swift as an antelope, to meet him, and to cling to him as she would have clung to him through evil and adversity, through the scorch of shame and the throes of death, through the taunts of the world and the ghastly terrors of the grave.

For many moments De Vigne could find no words even to tell her that which she never dreamed of, that which panted on his lips; he held her in his arms, crushing her in one long, close embrace, meeting as those meet who would not spend one hour of their lives asunder. For many moments he bent over her, speechless, breathless, straining her madly to him, spending on her lips the passion that found no fitting utterance in words; then, stifled and hoarse in its very agony of joy, his voice broke out:

“You will be my wife—this day—this hour! Alma! thank God with me—I am free!”

* * * * *

The day stole onward; faintly from the far distance swung the silvery sound of evening bells; the low south winds stirred among the lilac-blossoms, shaking their rich fragrance out upon the air; the bees hummed themselves to slumber in the hearts of folded roses; the mellow amber light grew deeper and clearer, while the first

stars were coming out in the west, the day was passing onward, ere long to fade into twilight, ere long to sink into night. And as the rays of the western sun swept through the parted network of the leaves and fell about his feet, shining in the eyes of the woman he loved, and bathing her hair in light where it swept across his breast, De Vigne bowed his head in thanksgiving too deep for words; not alone for the passionate joy in which his life was steeped, not alone for his freedom from that deadly curse that had been on him for so long—fruits of an early marriage—but for that hour, past yet still so near: so near that still he sickened at it, as men at the memory of some horrible death they have but by a hair's-breadth escaped; that hour when, for the first time in all his wayward, headlong, vehement manhood, he had *resisted* and flung off from him the temptation that, yielded to but for one brief fleeting instant, would, though never tracked or known by man, have made him taste fire in every kiss of the lips he loved, quail before the light of the fairest day that dawned, and start in the sweat of agony, and wake in the terror of remembered guilt from his sweetest rest, his most delicious sleep; that hour in the forest solitude, when, goaded, taunted, reviled, maddened, he had been face to face with what he loathed, parted by her from what he loved, he had had strength enough to fling her from him, untouched, unharmed, unchastised,—that hour which had been the crowning temptation of Granville De Vigne's life. He had had strength to cast it behind him with a firm hand, and had had strength to flee from it—*fearing himself*, as the wisest and holiest among us need do in those dark hours that come to all when there is but a plank between us and the fathomless abyss of some great guilt.

And while the starlit night of the early summer stole onward toward the earth, De Vigne bowed his head over

the woman who had cleaved to him through all, and would so have cleaved howsoever his life had turned, whose arms were close about him, and whose warm lips were on his ; and while a deep and delicious joy steeped his present and his future in its own golden and voluptuous delight, he looked backward for one instant to his Past, and thanked God.

II.

ADIEU AU LECTEUR !

THE history is told ! It is one simple enough and common enough in this world, and merely traces out the evil that accrued to two men in the same station of life and in similar circumstances, although of widely different temperaments, from an error of judgment—the most fatal error that man can make—an Early Marriage. Both my friends took advantage of this liberty, you see, to tie themselves again ! I *don't* say in that respect, “Go thou and do likewise,” ami lecteur, if you be similarly situated, but rather, if you are free—keep so ! A wise man, they say, knows when he is well off !

In the *Times* the other day, I read among the deaths, “At Paris, in her ninety-seventh year, Sarah, Viscountess Fantyre.” Gone at last, poor old woman, under the sod, where shrewdness and trickery and rouge and trump cards are of no avail to her, though she held by them to the last. She died as she had lived, I hear, sitting at her whist-table, be-wigged and be-rouged, gathering her dirty, costly lace about her, quoting George Selwyn, dealing herself two honors and six trumps, picking up the guineas with a cunning twinkle of her monkeyish eyes, when Death tapped

ner on the brain, and old Fantyre was carried off the scene in an apoplectic fit; while her partner, the Comte de Beaujeu, murmured over his tabatière, "Peste! Death is horribly ill bred; he should have let us played the conqueror!"

What memoirs the old woman might have left us—dirty ones, sans doute, but what memoirs of intrigues, plots, scandals, schemes—what rich glimpses behind the cards—what amusing peeps beneath the purple! A great many people, though, are glad, I dare say, that the Fantyre experiences are not down in black and white, and no publisher, perhaps, would have been courageous enough to risk their issue. They would have blackened plenty of fair reputations had their gunpowder burst; they would have offended a world which loves to prate of its morals, cackle of its purity, and double-lock its chamber-doors; they would have given us keys to many skeleton cupboards, which we should have opened to turn away from more heart-sick than before!

Her protégée, the Trefusis, has in nowise gone off the scene, nor did she consent to drop down into a valet's wife. Her exposée at Morehampton's villa had been the most bitter thing life could have brought her, for she had read enough of Rochefoucauld to think with him, "*le ridicule déshonore plus que le déshonneur.*" She sought the friendly shadow of Notre-Dame de Lorette. Fearing her husband no longer, she bribed him no more; and if you like to see her any day, walk down the Rue Bréda, or look out in the Pre Catalan for a carriage with lapis-lazuli liveries, dashing as the Montespan's, and you will have painted to you in a moment the full-blown magnificence (now certainly coarse, and I dare say only got up at infinite trouble from Blanc de Perle and Bulli's best rouge) of the quasi-milliner of Frestonhills. She has at present, *en proie*, a Russian prince, and thrives, *à ravir*, upon

roubles. Her imperial sables are the envy of the Quartier; and as women who range under the Piratical Flag don't trouble their heads with a Future, the Trefusis does not stop to think that she may end in le Maison Dieu, with a bowl of soupe maigre, when her beauty shall utterly have lost all that superb and sensual bloom that lured De Vigne in his hot youth to such deadly cost.

"A young man married is a man that's marred."

The stag with the grip of the stag-hound ever at his throat; the antelope with the fangs of the tigress ever tearing his reeking flanks; the racer yoked in the heavy galling shafts that he must drag behind him over stony roads till he faints and dies, still with his burden harnessed on him; these unions were not worse than many of those marriages that are the bitter fruit of no sin, no fault, no error, but merely of a *mistake*!—those marriages that are a bondage more cruel, more eternal, more unpitied than the captivity of Israel in Egypt!

"A young man married is a man that's marred." One wrote that who was more deeply skilled in the intricacies of the human heart, who saw more profoundly into the manifold varieties, the wayward and conflicting instincts of human life, than any by whom the world has since let itself be led and moulded. "Marred?" How can the man fail to be so who chooses his yoke-fellow for life in all the blind haste, the crude taste of his earlier years, when taste in all things alters so utterly from youth to manhood? In what the youth of five-and-twenty thinks so wise, fair, excellent, half a score or a score years later on he sees but little beauty. In study, sport, literature, his preference changes much in the interval that parts his early from his matured years; I have heard young fellows in their college terms utterly recant in June all they swore by religiously in January, equally earnest and sincere, more-

over, in their recantation and their adoration ! Taste, bias, opinion, judgment, all alter as their judgment widens, their taste ripens, and their sight grows keener from longer mixing amid the world, and longer studying its varied views. God help, then, the man who has taken to his heart and into his life a wife who, fair in his eyes in all the glamour of love, all the “purpureal light of youth,” is as insufficient to him in his maturer years as are the weaker thoughts, the cruder studies, the unformed judgment, the boyish revelries of his youth. The thoughts might be well in their way, the studies beneficial, the judgment generous and just, the revels harmless, but he has *outgrown them*—gone beyond them—left them far behind him ; and he can no more return to them and find them sufficient for him than he can return to the *Gradus ad Parnassum* of his first school-days. So the wife, too, may be good in her way ; he may strive to be faithful to her and to cleave to her as he has sworn to do ; he may seek with all his might to come to her side, to bring back the old feeling, to join the broken chain, to find her all he needs and all he used to think her ; he may strive with all his might to do this, but it is *Sisyphus-labor* ; she does not satisfy his manhood, the scales have fallen from his eyes, he loves her no longer ! It is not his fault ; she belongs to the things of his youth that pleased a crude taste, an immature judgment ; he sees her now *as she is*, and she is far below him, far behind him ; if he progress he must go on alone, if he fall back to her level his mind deteriorates with every day that dawns ! Would he bring to the Commons no arguments riper than the crude debates that were his glory at the Union ? would he condemn himself in science never to discard the unsound theories that were the delight of his early speculations ? would he deny himself the right to fling aside the moonshine philosophies, the cobweb metaphysics that he wove in his youth,

and forbid himself title to advance beyond them? Surely not! Yet he would chain himself through his lifelong to a yoke-fellow as unfit and insufficient to his older years as ever the theories and thoughts of his youth can be; as fatal to his peace while he is bound to her, as they, could he be bound to them, would be fatal to the mind they dwarfed, to the brain they crammed into a prison-cell!

In youth Rosaline seems very fair,
None else being by,
Herself poised with herself in either eye.

A young man meets a young girl in society, or at the sea-side, or on the deck of a Rhine steamer; she has nice fresh coloring, bright-blue eyes, or black ones, as the case may be, very nice ankles, and a charming voice. She is a pretty girl to everybody; to him, thrown across her by chance, she is beautiful—divine! He thinks, over his pipe, that she is just his ideal of *Ænone*, or *Gretchen*, or airy fairy *Lilian*, if he be of a poetic turn, and rank with German idealism; or meditates that she's "a clipper of a girl, and, by Jupiter! what lovely scarlet lips, and what a pretty foot!" if of a material disposition. He falls in love with her, as the phrase goes; he flirts with her at water-parties, and pays her a few morning calls; he sees her trifling with a bit of fancy-work, and hears her pretty voice say a few things about the weather. A few *œcillades*, a few waltzes, a few *têtes-à-têtes*; when looking at the rosebud lips he never criticises what they utter, and he proposes—he is accepted; they are both dreadfully in love, of course, and—marry. It is a pretty dream for a few months; an easy yoke, perhaps, for a few years; then gradually the illusions drop one by one, as the leaves drop from a shaken rose, loth, yet forced to fall. He finds her mind narrowed, bigoted, ill-stored, with no single thought

in it akin to his own. What could he learn of it in those few morning calls, those few ball-room *têtes-à-têtes*, when the glamour was on him, and he would have cared nothing though she could not have spelled his name? Or—he finds her a bad temper, (when does temper ever show in society, and how could he see her without society's controlling eye upon her?) snarling at her servants, her dogs, the soup, the east winds; meeting him with petulant acerbity, revenging on him her milliner's neglect, her maid's stupidity, her migraine, or her torn Mechlin. Or—he finds her a heartless coquette, cheapening his honor, holding his name as carelessly as a child holds a mirror, forgetting, like the child, that a breath on it is a stain; turning a deaf ear to his remonstrance; flinging at him, with a sneer, some died-out folly—"before *I* knew you, sir!"—that she has ferreted out; goading him to words that he knows, for his own dignity, were best unsaid, then turning to hysteria and *se posent en martyre*. Or—and this, I take it, is the worst case for both—the wife is a good wife, as many (ladies say most) wives are; he knows it, he feels it, he honors her for it, but—she is a bitter disappointment to him. He comes home worn out with the day's labor, but successful from it; he sits down to a *tête-à-tête* dinner; he tells her of the hard-won election, the hot-worded debate in the House, the issue of a great law-case that he has brought off victorious, of his conquest over death by the bedside of a sinking patient, of the compliment to his corps from the commander-in-chief, of the one thing that is the essence of his life and the end of his ambition; she listens with a vague, amiable, absent smile, but her heart is not with him, nor her ear. "Yes, dear—indeed—how very nice! But cook has ruined that splendid haunch. Do look! it is really burnt to a cinder!" She never gives him any more than that! She cannot help it; she is a good

patient, domestic, quiet woman, who would not do wrong for the world, but her sphere is the nursery, her thoughts center on the misdemeanors of her household, her mission is emphatically to "suckle fools and chronicle small beer." The perpetual drop, drop, of her small worries, her puerile pleasures, is like the ceaseless dropping of water on his brain; try how he might, he could never waken this woman's mind to one pulse in unison with his in the closest relationship of human life; she is less capable of understanding him in his defeats, his victories, his struggles, than the senseless writing-paper, which, though it cannot respond to them, at least lets him score his thoughts on its blank pages, and will bear them unobliterated! Yet this disunion in union is common enough in this world: when a man marries early it is too generally certain.

A man early married, moreover, is *prematurely aged*. While he is yet young his wife is old; while he is in the fullest vigor of his manhood, she is gray, and faded, and ageing; youth has long gone from her, while in him it is still fresh; and while away from her he is young, by her side he feels old. Married—in youth he takes upon himself burdens that should never weigh save upon middle age; in middle age he plays the part that should be reserved for age alone. I read the other day, in an essay, a remark of the writer's relative to the marriage of Milverton, in the last series of *Friends in Council*, with a girl of twenty-two, in which he said that he could well conceive what a delight it might be to a man at or past middle age, who had believed his youth lost forever, to have it restored to him in a love which gives him the rich and subtle gladness that brings back the "greenness to the grass and the glory to the flower." It is true; and it is this later love which can satisfy him and not fade and disappoint him; since it is in later years alone that his own character will

have become no longer mutable, his own tastes have ripened, and his own judgment grown secure. Yet to the man who has married early, this resurrection of his youth can never come, or, if it come, can only come in bitterness, like the bitterness of the prisoner who catches one glimpse of the fair laughing earth lying beyond in the sunlight, and knows that the bars of his cell are fixed, and that on his limbs are the weight of irons.

And, to take it in a more practical sense, scarcely the less inevitably from every point is "a young man married a man that's marred." If to men of fortune, like Sabretasche and De Vigne, with every opiate of pleasure and excitement to drown the gall and fret of uncongenial or unhappy union, early marriage blots and mars life as it does, how much more bitter still to those who are poor and struggling men, with the burden of work, hardly done and scantily paid, upon their shoulders, is its fatal error! A young man starts in life with no capital, but a good education and a profession, that, like all professions, cannot be lucrative to him till time has mellowed his reputation, and experience made him, more or less, a name in it. It brings him quite enough for his *garçon* wants; he lives comfortably enough in his chambers or his lodgings, with no weightier daily outlay than his Cavendish and his chop; study comes easy to him, with a brain that has no care gnawing on it; society is cheap, for his chums come contentedly for a pipe, and some punch or some beer, and think none the worse of him because he does not give them turtle and Vin Mosseux. He can live for little if he like; if he want change and travel, he can take his knapsack and a walking tour; nobody is dependent on him; if he be straitened by poverty, the strain is on him alone; he is not tortured by the cry of those who look to him for daily bread; the world is before him, to choose at least where he

will work in it; in a word, he is free! But, if he marries, his up-hill career is fettered by a clog that draws him backward every step he sets; his profession is inadequate to meet the expenses that crowd in on him; if he keep manfully and honestly out of debt, economy and privation eat his very life away, as, say what romancists may, they ever must; if he live beyond his income, as too many professional men are almost driven to do in our day, there is a pressure upon him like the weights they laid upon offenders in the old Newgate press-yards. He toils, he struggles, he works, as brain-workers must, feverishly and at express speed to keep in the van at all; he is old, while by right of years he should yet be young, in the constant harassing rack and strain to "keep up appearances," and *seem* well off while every shilling is of consequence; he writes for his bread with the bray of brawling children above his head; he goes to his office turning over and over in wretched arithmetic the sums he owes to the baker and the butcher; he smiles courteously upon his patients or his clients with the iron in his soul and county-court summonses hanging over his head. He goes back from his rounds or his office, or comes out of his study after a long day, jaded, fagged, worn out; comes, not to quiet, to peace, to solitude, with a Havana and a book, to anything that would soothe the fagged nerves and ease the strain for an hour at least, but only for some miserable petty worry, some fresh small care; to hear his wife going into mortal agonies because her youngest son has the measles, or bear the leer of the servants when they say "the tax-gatherer's called again, and, please, must he go away?"

Corregio *literally* dying in the heat and burden of the day, of the weary weight, the torturing rack of home-cares, his family and his poverty dragging him downward and

clogging his genius as the drenching rains upon its wings clog the flight of a bird, is but sample of the death-in-life, the age-in-youth, the self-begotten curse, the self-elected doom, that almost inevitably dog the steps of a man who has married early, be his station what it may, be his choice what it will.

This Spring of Love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day,
Which shows now all the beauty of the sun,
And by-and-by a cloud takes all away!

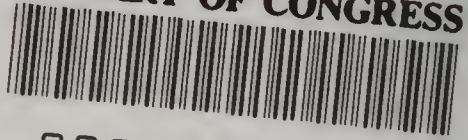
Such is love, rarely anything better, scarcely ever anything more durable. Such are all *early* loves, invariably, inevitably. God help, then, though we may count them by the myriad, those who in and for that one brief "April day," which, warm and shadowless at morning, sees the frost down long before night, pay rashly as Esau paid in the moment of eager delight, when no price was counted and no value asked; pay, with headstrong thoughtlessness, in madman's haste, the one priceless birthright upon earth—Freedom!

"A young man married is a man that's marred!"

END OF VOL. II.

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